

Peas and lettuce like cooler temperatures

By Kay Melia
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 Very soon now, human beings of all shapes and sizes will emerge from hibernation and begin the six or seven month process of growing some of their own fresh food.



kay melia
 • the gardener

This group of homo sapiens call themselves gardeners and take great joy in the practice of family food production.

My guess is many of these creatures will take hoe in hand as early as next week to begin this project, and I'll be among 'em.

Weather and soil temperature permitting, there are indeed certain vegetables that will thrive in your

garden when planted early. Peas, onions, radishes and lettuce all prefer a soil temperature as cool as 40 degrees. They detest the 90 degree heat of early summer, so the earlier they can be planted, the longer the harvest.

Garden lettuce continues to intrigue me. I never tire of planting two or three of the many, many different varieties of lettuce.

The varying colors and textures are just sensational among the other early spring plantings.

Never mind that garden lettuce offers very little taste, although occasionally, the name given to certain varieties conjures up imaginative ideas of how those leaves should taste.

Like Buttercrunch lettuce for example. Buttercrunch doesn't taste like butter, nor is it crunchy. But it has been a favorite in my garden and salad bowl for years. Who could resist planting a few seeds of the

old Austrian romaine called Flashy Trout's Back that gives the visual impression someone has accidentally "dripped" red paint on its dark green leaves. No, it does not have a fishy flavor.

And then there is a lettuce variety called Drunken Woman Frizzy Headed that is a Butterhead type that offers no explanation of how it got its name. Thank goodness!

Some of the Loose Leaf types carry very descriptive names such as Green Deer Tongue, Merlot, Mascara, Pom Pom and Midnight Ruffles.

There's literally dozens of other names of lettuces in all four of the

garden lettuce types, which are, in addition to Leaf Lettuce, include the Crisphead, the Loosehead, and the Romaine. All offer their own growing habit, texture and unique appearance.

However, taste varies very little from one to the other. If you want lots of taste in your fresh salad bowl, plant some of the mescluns which include arugula, chicory, radicchio or purslane.

The big news this year in the lettuce patch is that a few of the seed companies have begun to "pellet" their lettuce seed.

Pelleting is the process of forming a clay biodegradable case around

a seed, or seeds, allowing you to grasp the pellet and place it in the soil at reasonable intervals, rather than dropping too many tiny seeds in one spot. Burpee, J.W. Jung, and Territorial Seed are among others offering pelleted lettuce seed for the first time this year. I'm anxious to see the result

I intend to plant those lettuce pellets, a couple of rows of peas and a packet of spinach late next week, providing the soil temperature is 40 degrees or above, and not too wet.

Potatoes? Not yet. We'll discuss that subject next week.

Is it good to mow the lawn lower in the spring?

We often are asked whether it is good to mow lower in the spring. The answer is yes and no. It doesn't hurt to mow lower than normal the first mowing or two. As a matter of fact, it can actually speed green-up by removing old, dead grass and allowing the soil to warm up faster.



dana belshe
 • ag notebook

But the mowing height should be raised to normal after the first or second cutting to discourage

crabgrass.

Crabgrass seed must have light to germinate, and a high mowing

height will shade the soil. Also, root depth and mowing height are related on upright growing grasses such as tall fescue

and Kentucky bluegrass - the higher the height of cut, the deeper the root system. A deeper root system means a more drought-resistant turf.

So, how low should you go on the first cutting? On tall fescue and

Kentucky bluegrass, you should mow at about 1 to 1½ inches. Be careful you don't go so low that you scalp the turf.

Normal mowing height for Kentucky bluegrass is 2 to 3 inches and

for tall fescue is 2½ to 3½ inches.

Starting the year off with a sharp mower blade will help make a clean cut on newly greening turf and minimize damage to the young shoots.



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 www.goodlandfccdoc.org

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