



Fact & Folklore

1 HISTORY AND FACTS

The lettuce we see today started out as a weed around the Mediterranean basin. In ancient Egypt, lettuce was believed to be sacred to the fertility god Min and considered to be a powerful aphrodisiac. The first representation of salad appeared in paintings on Egyptian tombs in 4500 BC.

Lettuce was first eaten by the ancient kings of Persia 2,500 years ago. The ancient Greeks and Romans thought it helped you to have a good night's sleep.

Salad acquired nobility during the Greek and Roman civilisations and became popular to eat. The Romans in particular cultivated it and consumed it raw and minced. Under Emperor Dominican, the Romans served salad as a starter, where previously it had been served at the end of a meal.

Christopher Columbus introduced lettuce to the new world in the 1400's. Leonardo da Vinci was the first artist to depict salad in his paintings - In *Leda and the Swan* (1510 - 15) a child, standing next to the goddess of fertility, poses with a bouquet of lamb's lettuce.

The 17th century horticulturist, John Evelyn, is believed to have introduced the vegetable to England. The first commercial supplies of Iceberg lettuce arrived on British shores in the mid 1970's from the USA where it had been developed. It was not until 1984 that British growers mastered its growing techniques and it became popular through the classic Prawn Cocktail.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, lettuces known as 'continental' or 'specialty', such as Batavia, Lollo Rosso and Romaine, began to be grown here after being introduced from Europe. In the late 1990s baby leaf and further specialty leaves such as rocket were grown in the UK.

The first bagged salad was a shredded iceberg sold by Marks & Spencer in 1986.

Today we have a wider choice of leafy salad available to enjoy than ever before. Advances in farming mean that a wider variety of salads are now grown and supplied with better yields from around Europe.

2 ETYMOLOGY

The name lettuce is derived from the Latin word "Lattuca," which refers to the vegetable's milky sap and it is believed that the Romans introduced it to Britain.

Salad comes from the Latin word "herba salta" or "salted herbs," so called because such greens were usually seasoned with dressings containing lots of salt.

Iceberg was given its name as a result of the leaf being developed in America and being packed with ice so as to survive transport in warm temperatures.



The term 'Salad Days', used in the English language, means different things in the UK and the USA. In the UK it comes from Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra (Act 1, Scene 5). It means carefree days of one's youth and is associated with innocence, inexperience, idealism and indiscretion. Cleopatra says:

"My salad days, When I was green in judgment: cold in blood, To say as I said then!"

In the USA 'Salad Days' is not the preserve of youth and has come to mean when a person was at the peak of their abilities.

The name Lamb's Lettuce was given to the leaf because of its resemblance to the size and shape of a lamb's tongue. There is also a belief that it was so named because it is the favourite food of lambs (in some territories the first crop appeared around lambing time).