

The latest high dollar crop everyone's talking about is Salad Mix. It is also known as: Mesclun Mix Salad Greens, European Salad Mix, Mixed Greens, Spring Mix, Designer Salad, Signature Salad, etc. Many people have been asking about this product. What comprises the Salad Mix? How is it grown and packed? Many growers already understand that there is a consumer demand for locally produced, high quality Salad Mix. With a crop harvested every 3-4 weeks and sold at a retail price of \$5.00-\$6.00 per pound (or more!), Salad Mix can be a high dollar "crop."

What is Salad Mix?

Salad Mix is both a convenience food and a value added product. Although it requires more labor than regular lettuce, it can command a premium price. Salad Mix is a blend of lettuces and greens cut at the seedling stage (3-4 weeks). The blend is a balance of color, texture and flavor which can be tailored to your specific market or customer.

How do I grow Salad Mix?

Start by choosing varieties that mature in 40-50 days and color early. Planting methods vary according to your production needs, soil type, season and the method of field management you prefer. Here are 3 common ways of planting Salad Mix:

1. Blend your seed varieties together and broadcast them into a 6 foot bed. This one-step method saves labor at the harvesting stage. However, there may be competition from some varieties that grow quickly and which will dwarf the slower-growing varieties, leaving you with an unbalanced mix.
2. Direct seed individual rows of each variety of lettuce and greens. This method enables you to create your mix as you harvest. It also lends itself to "fine tuning" your mix. If you have an account that wants more red or a spikier flavor in the mix, you will be able to add more of that ingredient because of the individual row plantings. We suggest that you plant separate beds of lettuce and flavor greens. Caveat: Everything in the brassica family should be grown together in a separate bed to allow you optimum control of insects and spraying costs.

How is Salad Mix harvested?

The most sophisticated method uses a harvester that cuts and vacuums up the greens as it passes over the beds. Most growers, however, use shears and/or scissors to cut at the base of the plant while holding a cluster of plant tops in the other hand. Cut the leaves about 1/2 inch above the soil line. Some growers even use electric hedge shears to cut the leaves, and a rake to gather the greens by raking across the beds. The greens are then placed in bread trays or rubber tubs.

Some varieties will "cut-and-come-again"; after cutting they will re-sprout and grow again. We do not recommend the cut-and-come-again approach, as growth can be erratic. Also, depending on the light and hot weather conditions, most plants will bolt or tipburn. Regrowth may also be more fibrous due to plant stress. If you need a reliable and consistent production level, we recommend re-seeding.

What yield can I expect?

This is very difficult to answer, because yield is dependent on the density of planting and which varieties you choose to plant. Yield from one Red Salad Bowl plant can be 1/2 ounce. Tatsoi could yield 1 or 1 1/2 ounces per plant. Growers report yields of one pound of salad mix per 5-8 square feet of growing space.

How is Salad Mix packed/prepared for market?

The components of the mix need to be washed, dried and cooled. (Cooling is most needed when a long shelf life is desired.) Then the components are bagged according to your customer needs. Washing of the Salad Mix can be done in tubs, or try a stock tank. Spin-drying can be done with mesh bags in an old washing machine or a commercial spin drier. Washed, spun and blended Salad Mix is commonly packaged in plastic bags of various sizes: 5 ounces, 1/2 lb., 1 lb., 3 lbs., and 5 lbs. The 3 and 5 pound sizes are wholesale units which are also packed in corrugated boxes lined with plastic. At open markets (for example, farmer's markets) some growers prefer to allow customers to fill their own plastic bags.

Which varieties can I use for Salad Mix?

The following varieties have proven their performance in Salad Mix. For a complete description of these varieties, please see our 1997 Commercial Catalog.

Note: While many of these varieties are heat-tolerant, in general lettuce does not germinate well in soils hotter than 80F. When planting in hot weather, be sure to keep the lettuce seeds sprinkled until they germinate. Also note that the Splitkote D process primes the seed to expand both the temperature range and speed of germination.

Salad Mix Lettuces		
BASICS	BASICS	ALTERNATIVES
Red Salad Bowl (red oakleaf)	Red Giant (red mustard)*	Fennel (herb, leaf type)*
Parris Island (green romaine)	Space (spinach)	Red Basil*
Rouge D'Hiver (red romaine)	Rhodos (endive)*	Purple Ruffles Basil*
Lollo Rossa (frilly red leaf)	Tatsoi (Asian green)	Golden Purslane (purslane)
Tango (green leaf)	Kyona/Mizuna (Asian)*	Sylvetta (arugula taste)*
New Red Fire (red leaf)	Tetragonia (spinach flavor)	Autumn Poem (Asian green)
Red Sails (red leaf)	Ruby Red (Swiss chard)	Radicchio (red leaf)*
	Fordhook Giant (chard)	
ALTERNATIVES	ALTERNATIVES	
Redina (deep red leaf)	Chervil*	
Vulcan (glossy deep red leaf)	Catalogna Special (dandelion)*	
Royal Oak (green oakleaf)	San Pasquale (dandelion)*	
Vanity (frilly green leaf)	Early Wonder Tall Top (beet greens)	
Summer Bibb (green bibb)	Arugula (herb)*	
Cerise (red leaf)	Golden Beet (beet greens)	
Sierra (red-tinged leaf)	Chioggia (beet greens)	
Romulus (green romaine)	Vitamin Green (Asian green)	
Pirat (red romaine)	Curly Cress (cress)	
Loma (green toothed leaves)	Minutina (cold hardy)	
Rouge de Grenoble (red leaf)	Osaka Purple (purple mustard)	
Cardinale (red leaf) Samantha (red leaf)	Hon Tsai Tai (red broccoli raab) Vit (mache/corn salad)	
Sesam (Lollo Rossa-type, deeper red/low light) Impuls (Lollo Rossa-type, deeper red/low light) Marvel 4 Seasons (red butterhead) Nevada (green leaf)	Jade (mache/corn salad) Peacock Kale (feather kale) Red Russian Kale (red kale) Red/Green Amaranth Red Orach (red leafed green) Komatsuna (Asian Green)	

* Adds "spike" to the mix

NOTE: These are some of the possibilities you can use to design your mix. Johnny's catalog offers over 100 different elements to choose from.

Where do I find a market for my Salad Mix?

Many growers have been successful in selling their Salad Mix at their own roadside stands or at farmer's markets. Some have supplied Salad Mix to local retail stores. A likely market for your produce is the restaurant business. Go to the local restaurants; talk to the chefs. Good restaurants will be seeking the freshest ingredients possible. Tell them what you can provide. You can even show them Johnny's catalog and let them tell you which ingredients they prefer.

How can I create a unique look for my Salad Mix?

The addition of edible flowers to your mix can add unique interest, color and flavor. Start simple by sprinkling some petals or small florets on the mix. Use fresh flowers at their peak, carefully washed. Try nasturtiums, calendulas, violas, pansies, small-bloomed marigolds, scarlet runner beans, borage, etc. Use your imagination!

What happens when your lettuce and greens are ready to harvest for Salad Mix at 3 to 4 weeks and you have no market for them? Braising/Saute Mix!

What is Braising/Saute Mix?

It's your Salad Mix (minus the lettuce) gone by. It's a "teenaged" Salad Mix compared to the baby greens used for Salad Mix. At this 5-6 week stage you can cut the greens to sell as a ready-to-cook Saute Mix. (This is another good reason to plant your lettuces separate from the greens.) Besides this Braising Mix, make available to your customers a selection of peppers, snow peas, broccoli flowerets, summer squash, etc. Your customers will have a complete dinner, and you have a great sale!

Most growers prefer to grow each variety separately so that they can create custom blends. Generally, the mix will contain 5-6 different varieties, but there are as many possible blends as there are growers and users. Most green plants will be ready at two weeks growth where red and purple plants require three weeks to size up. Coordination of the "mix" so that all the varieties mature to the optimal taste and size at the same time will involve a complex sowing schedule. A basic recipe might include: Beet greens, Mustards, Kales, Mizuna, Tatsoi, Arugula, Red Chard, and Red Cabbage. You may offer your own standard mix and then customize as requested.

Production

Micro mix is grown in greenhouses, sown into 20 row flats, with light, sterile, soilless mix. Use a flat shallow enough to minimize your use of the mix, while retaining enough moisture to avoid overly frequent watering. Broadcast the seeds thickly on the surface of the flat and water with a mister to avoid splashing dirt onto the mix. If fertilizing, use only a bottom watering system.

Harvest

Micro mix is harvested with at least one set of edible true leaves, generally between 1 to 2 inches in height. Tasting each variety will give you the best idea as to the optimal harvest period. To reduce damage from handling, harvest by cutting with scissors directly into the package, often a clear plastic clamshell. Some sources for clamshells are Monte Package Co (800)-653-2807 or Ultra Pac, Inc. (800)-999-9001

Attributes of Different Varieties Used for Micro-Mix:

Amaranth: mild & colorful, Arugula: sharp, spiky flavor, Basil: sweet, spicy & colorful, Beet greens: vibrant color, mild flavor, Brassicas: mild cabbage flavor, Buckwheat: fast growing, pink stems, Red Cabbage: weight & color, Chinese Cabbage: weighty, Chard: colorful petioles, mild flavor, Chervil: parsley/anise flavor, Cilantro: distinctive pungent flavor, Cress: strong radish flavor, Daikon: crisp texture, radish flavor, Dill: delicate, slightly tangy flavor, Endive: slightly bitter flavor, Fennel: strong, sweet earthy flavor, Kale: weighty, colorful leaves, Mizuna: mild cabbage flavor, Mustard: pungent & colorful, Orach: mild & colorful. Peas: pea taste, interesting weighty leaf, Radicchios: sharp flavor, Shungiku: a bitter green, Spinach: mild flavor.