



ICEBERG LETTUCE – A CORNERSTONE OF AMERICAN CUISINE

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Synonymous with growing up in America, Iceberg lettuce is, in a way, the ultimate comfort food. It's simple, reliable, and its incredible staying power has allowed it to be a cultural culinary icon for over 100 years. Even James Beard – the father of American gastronomy – was a fan, saying, "Many people damn it, but it adds good flavor and a wonderfully crisp texture to a salad." ("It also keeps longer than other lettuces," he pointed out.)

A Brief History

- Legend has it that Iceberg came to be when a different looking, sweeter tasting head of lettuce somehow appeared in a grower's field over one hundred years ago.
 - Noticing it was quite different from the lettuces surrounding it – and liking its flavor and superior crispness – the growers teamed with other lettuce producers to make it even better.
- Iceberg was introduced by the W. Atlee Burpee Seed Co. in 1894 with this catalog description, "There is no handsomer or more solid cabbage lettuce in cultivation."
- New varieties of durable, easily shippable "crisphead lettuce" began emerging in California in the mid-1920's.
 - Around that same time, 1923 to be exact, Eijiro Tanimura moved his family to Castroville, California where he heard Iceberg lettuce could be grown in the summer because of the rich soil and cool weather.
 - In 1930, Lester Antle moved his family to the Salinas Valley region to get involved in the Iceberg lettuce industry.
- The Iceberg lettuce industry exploded during WWII as salads were seen as a real morale booster. After the war, its popularity continued as soldiers came home wanting the same assortment of fresh produce procured by the military.
- Bud Antle was instrumental in introducing the vacuum cooling process to the Iceberg industry, causing the changeover from ice-packed, wooden crates to corrugated carton-field packing.
- Iceberg knew no rival until the 1970's when consumers started to experiment with new salads.
- Today, with the return of the classic Iceberg Wedge, it's still America's favorite. In fact, Americans eat more Iceberg than any other lettuce.

What's In A Name?

- It was called "crisphead lettuce" because of its ability to stay fresher longer than leaf lettuces.
- The name "Iceberg" comes from the way the lettuce was packed and transported on ice, making the heads look like icebergs.

What About The Wedge?

- While there don't seem to be any claimants (hotels, chefs or restaurants) to the invention of the classic American Iceberg Wedge Salad, the general consensus places it as a ubiquitous menu entry of the 1950's and 1960's.
- After a brief decline in popularity in the 1970's and 1980's, the Iceberg Wedge Salad is enjoying a retro rebirth on trendy menus.

- Steakhouses refuse to give it up; it remains a popular mainstay offering at steakhouses across the U.S.
- New popular toppings include Maytag bleu cheese, chunky feta, avocados, bacon, and nuts.

Iceberg In Numbers

- Records indicate that the first carlot shipment of Iceberg was made in 1919 and took 21 days to reach New York from California.
- By 1931, 20,000 railcars were shipped annually. In 1950, over 11.5 million crates of Iceberg was grown, packed and shipped in Monterey County, California.
- Iceberg lettuce is a minor crop in the U.S. with approximately 143,000 acres produced annually in California.
- California produces approximately 72% of the Iceberg lettuce grown in the U.S.
- Iceberg accounts for 70% of the lettuce raised in California.
- Depending on the time of year Iceberg is planted, it takes anywhere from 70 to 130 days from planting to harvest.

The typical U.S. consumer eats about 35 pounds of lettuce per year; Iceberg lettuce represents the largest portion of this, about two thirds or about 22 pounds per year.