

WINTER SALAD LEAVES INDOORS

During winter, salad leaves may well be scarce, but **Charles Dowding** suggests ways to keep a plentiful supply by growing them in a glasshouse. Photography by Tim Sandall



Young salad leaves provide colour and flavour in winter

Summer leaves are often plentiful, but growing salad leaves in winter can be much more challenging. Outdoor plants go dormant in cold weather outdoors, but the same plants indoors can reward you with a succession of small leaves through winter. Even in limited space, a mix of flavours and colours can be grown – and a glasshouse is the perfect place to start.

Requirements are simple: good compost, watering, feed, suitable salad leaf cultivar seed and appropriate containers. These could be seed trays, pots, or even old boxes and crates. I converted a pallet into a shallow bed in a corner of my glasshouse (below) with great success, and have found that even in limited space, a good mix of flavours and colours can be grown.

Members of the cabbage family thrive in winter; try fast-growing Oriental leaves for many variations in colour and texture, from smooth, pale-green mibuna to deeply serrated, ruby-coloured 'Red Frills' mustard. Lettuces, rockets, kale and chicories will also help to fill the salad bowl through winter.

With a little planning, and some space indoors, it is easy to grow a wide range of tasty salad leaves all year round. ■

Charles Dowding, author and speaker, grows salads and vegetables in Somerset



GROWING WINTER LEAVES INDOORS

Harvest: January to March.

Sow: September-early October indoors.

Description: indoor leaves are larger, healthier and more abundant than those grown outdoors at this time, so supplying a salad bowl is somewhat easier. This is especially true by late February and March.

Essential ingredients: a range of plants which are showing little new growth outdoors at this time of year are suitable for growing indoors. These include land cress, winter purslane, lettuce and sorrel, as well as fast-growing oriental leaves. Their flavours range from mild pak choi and mizuna to fiery mustards such as 'Red Giant' and 'Sheurifong'. Try rocket, kale or spinach, and herbs such as coriander and chervil. Carefully picked plants should provide leaves for almost half a year, from November until at least April.

Containers: salad plants can be grown indoors, either in the ground or in containers on staging, which can be anything from pots to polystyrene fish boxes (with drainage holes). Cloches also offer great possibilities, as long as plants are established by about the end of September, from sowings in late August.



For more on growing salad leaves, read Charles Dowding's article in the March issue of *The Garden* 2010