



# Gardening Insights

April to June 2014

## *Bolted lettuce blues...*

Spring, in most of the country, is when vegie gardeners' hearts race at the smell of freshly tilled dirt, the promise within new seed packets, and the miracle of tiny cotyledons bursting from bare ground. In the desert southwest, however, spring is when our arugula and cilantro turn into woody flowering shrubs, the pea vines burn to delicate crispy tracings, and we start buying lettuce from the store. It's that passing of fresh, sweet garden lettuces that bothers me most and with the warm winter we've had, my plants turned bitter before forming large heads. But now I found a way I can use the otherwise inedible lettuces - cook them! They are quite tasty stir-fried like Asian greens and the harsh taste is eliminated. There is a recipe on the next page that comes from the New York Times. I've added my suggestions for "improvements" and options below it. Give it a try if you're mourning lettuces gone milky and bitter.

By the way, if you let your lettuces go to seed, the Lesser goldfinches and Verdins will be very happy. They might even leave a bit of seed for you to harvest for next year's planting.



## *Open Studio Tours in Tucson*

Dozens of studios are open **this weekend** (April 12 and 13) for the annual Tucson Artists' Open Studio tour. It runs from 11 - 5 each day and there are places to visit across the city. I usually have a group here, but this spring I'm going solo and will be working on commissions for bee habitats, clocks, and indoor sculptures. Please stop by if you're in the neighborhood. You can see a piece I'm making for the Phoenix Zoo before I install it there the following week.

More information and a list of artists is available at: [www.tucsonopenstudios.com/](http://www.tucsonopenstudios.com/)



## *Stir-Fried Lettuce With Seared Tofu and Red Pepper*

By MARTHA ROSE SHULMAN

Published: May 8, 2012 New York Times

- 2 tablespoons Shao Hsing rice wine or dry sherry
- 1 tablespoon chicken broth, vegetable broth or water
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons peanut oil, rice bran oil or canola oil
- 12 ounces firm tofu, drained on paper towels and cut into dominoes or diced
- 2 teaspoons minced ginger
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon minced serrano or jalapeño chili
- 1 red bell pepper, cut in 2-inch-long julienne
- 1 pound romaine lettuce (1 generous head or 2 hearts), cut crosswise into 1-inch-wide pieces
- Salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

1. Mix together the rice wine or sherry, the broth or water and 2 teaspoons of the soy sauce and set aside.

2. Heat a 14-inch flat-bottomed wok or 12-inch steel skillet over high heat until a drop of water evaporates within a second or two when added to the pan. Swirl in 1 tablespoon of the oil by adding it to the sides of the pan and swirling the pan, then add the tofu and stir-fry until golden brown. Add the remaining soy sauce, toss together and transfer the tofu to a plate.

3. Swirl in the remaining oil and add the ginger, garlic and chili pepper and stir-fry for no more than 10 seconds. Add the red pepper and stir-fry for 1 minute, then add the lettuce and sprinkle on the salt. Stir-fry for 1 minute, until the lettuce has begun to wilt. Add the rice wine mixture, cook 15 to 30 seconds, until the lettuce is bright and crisp tender, stir in the cilantro and remove from the heat. Serve with rice or noodles.

Yield: 4 servings.

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*This is a very easy and tasty recipe, though I feel it's improved with a dollop of sweet chili sauce, like Lingham's and a few crushed peanuts. I like bits of chopped Thai chile too.*

*Next I'm trying fried lettuce with black bean paste and ground pork. I usually make that with greens like Yu Choi, but lettuce should be very good as well. I'll serve it with rice or rice noodles.*





## *Growdown Gardens at Tucson Botanical Gardens*

I had the pleasure of working with Maria Voris, a talented local landscape architect, on her entry for TBG's 2nd annual Growdown event. Three designers were given 10' x 20' plots on which to install gardens in three short days! Maria's garden won first place with a handsome ramada, desert plantings, and my contribution, a hanging seat made of recycled maple dance flooring and angle iron. The seat hangs from the rafters on thin, but strong, stainless steel aircraft cable and sways very gently. The garden and seat are illustrated above and will be at TBG through the end of June. If you're interested in that seat, or a custom one made just for you, give me a call. I have lots of materials and lots of ideas!!!

## *Sonoran X Cactus and Succulent Conference*

Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society is holding its biennial conference on April 19th and 20th and the theme this year is "Plants for the Sonoran Desert Hobbyist".

The event includes guest speakers and workshops (for which there are fees) plus a huge sale that includes plants (including some native rescued cacti), cactus and succulent books, art, and pottery. There is a plant show featuring cacti and succulents from private member collections plus a silent auction -- these open to the public at no charge.

I will have a table at the event and will be selling bee habitats and plant stands. I hope you can stop by.

Location/Dates/Times:

Hotel Tucson City Center

475 N. Granada Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85701

Saturday April 19, from 8 am to 9 pm and Sunday April 20 from 8 am to 3:30 pm.



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