



# HOW MESCLUN SANK THE ICEBERG

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Pop the top of a plastic box, grab a big handful of greens and you're a few crunchy bits and a drizzle of dressing away from a delicious, healthy salad. Americans didn't always have it so easy. Before the mid-1980s, "salad" meant mostly one thing: a head of iceberg lettuce. There were no neat packages of prewashed mixed greens to be found at the grocery store, no baby arugula or radicchio. So how did the wondrous variety of greens at our fingertips become a \$5 billion industry?

BY TINA  
CAPUTO



## HOW THE OWNERS OF EARTHBOUND FARM'S SOLUTION FOR HEALTHIER MEALS MADE IT ONE OF THE MOST PURCHASED PRODUCTS IN THE PRODUCE DEPARTMENT

When Myra and Drew Goodman (*above*) moved to a 2½-acre raspberry farm in California's Carmel Valley in 1984, they knew virtually nothing about farming. The Manhattan natives viewed the move as a temporary stop on the way to graduate school and big-city careers. But they never left the farm.

"It was a very romantic time," Myra says. "We were city kids getting up with the sunrise, working all day on the farm. As more time passed, going back to school and an urban environment became less and less appealing." Earthbound Farm was born.

They started out selling their organic berries at a roadside stand at the end of their driveway, then added lettuce to their offerings when they heard that a Berkeley chef, Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, was serving organic baby salad greens at her restaurant. They planted varieties most Americans had never heard of—Tango, Lolla Rosa, Red Oak Leaf—and found a niche market among forward-thinking chefs.

Restaurant sales were good for Earthbound Farm's business, but bad for the Goodmans' diet. After long days of farming, they were too tired to prepare healthy meals, and survived mainly on frozen pizza. "We were living this idyllic farm life but we were eating terribly," Drew recalls. "We weren't eating what we were growing."

The Goodmans began washing and bagging greens for weeknight salads and

found that they loved the convenience. "We thought it was really cool that we could just open a bag and have these beautiful greens that were so alive and tasty," Myra says, "but we never thought about doing it as a commercial product."

That changed in 1986, when Earthbound lost its main restaurant client, leaving Myra and Drew with acres of organic baby greens and nowhere to sell them. In desperation, they filled zip-top bags with prewashed mixed lettuces and took them around to retailers first in Carmel, then expanded to San Francisco.

The salads were an instant hit, prompting the Goodmans to ramp up their retail efforts. Lacking the funds for a proper facility, they started by washing and drying greens in their living room, using tubs and household salad spinners, then huge plastic garbage cans fitted with mesh bags. Later they built a washing shed with stainless-steel sinks, and Myra's father helped cobble together contraptions to streamline the process—like a hoist-and-pulley system that moved greens between bins.

In the decades to follow, Earthbound Farm expanded and introduced innovations that helped the bagged-salad industry take root. The most important was a mechanical harvester for baby greens, developed in the late 1990s, which allowed farmers to increase production by eliminating labor-intensive hand-picking. (See "Growth Spurt," page 86.) Earthbound



### RED OAK LEAF

Shaped like the leaves of an oak tree, it has a silky texture and a sweet, earthy flavor.



### LOLLA ROSA

Known for curled green leaves with red edges, it's prized for its chewy texture and pleasantly bitter flavor.



### TANGO

Frilly, pale-green leaves lead many to mistake this crisp-textured lettuce for endive, but it's mild and tangy.



### MÂCHE

With a name that rhymes with *squash*, this French heirloom has cupped leaves that taste nutty.



### TATSOI

An Asian green with a mild, mustard-like taste, tatsu has broad, spoon-shaped leaves.



### PEA LEAVES

The young leaves of English, snow or sugar snap pea plants (also known as shoots) are higher in protein than other greens, and have a sweet pea-like flavor.

## 6 COOL SALAD GREENS

The mesclun revolution introduced us to varieties we weren't otherwise eating. Look for these in your box or bag.

plant  
your  
plate

Learn how to grow a salad container garden in just a few easy steps at [eatingwell.com/plantyourplate](http://eatingwell.com/plantyourplate)

## GROWTH SPURT

3 tech innovations that helped fuel the industry

### THE MECHANICAL HARVESTER (RIGHT)

U.S. lettuce growers picked baby greens by hand until a mechanical harvester came on the scene in the late 1990s. This contraption, developed by Salinas Valley farmer and then-partner Stan Pura, made it possible to pick at record speed without damaging the tender leaves, allowing farmers to increase production. The machine has a giant blade that gently cuts the densely planted baby greens, which fill small totes at the back of the harvester. As the totes fill up, they're loaded onto a flatbed that drives alongside. The current version has been upgraded with a continuously sanitized blade plus a device that optically identifies non-plant material and keeps it out of the harvest.

### "BREATHABLE" BAGS

Mixed greens first hit the market in resealable plastic bags that prevented the lettuce from breathing, leading to speedy spoilage. In the early 1990s, "breathable" high-tech plastic bags arrived on the scene: they allow oxygen to enter and carbon dioxide to escape, keeping lettuce fresher longer.

### TRIPLE-WASHING SYSTEM

A victory for food safety, the automated triple-washing system that Ready Pac introduced in 2001 quickly became the industry standard for packaged salads. Lettuce travels via flumes (think: a water slide for leafy greens) through three separate water baths that include a tiny amount of sodium hypochlorite—aka bleach—to prevent cross-contamination and manage microorganisms. It then takes a twirl in a giant salad spinner that holds nearly 300 pounds of greens at a time.

An Earthbound Farm harvesting team is hard at work in California's Salinas Valley. The metal tines at the front of the harvester, called "ticklers," disturb insects and send them flying before the machine cuts the leaves. Any remaining plant material is worked into the soil to help improve its health.



## FROM ICEBERG TO BABY GREENS

1894

W. Atlee Burpee Co. introduces **iceberg lettuce** in their annual seed catalog; the vigorous, heat-tolerant crisphead lettuce proves enduringly popular with commercial and home growers.

1930s

Farmer Bruce Church starts shipping fresh heads of lettuce from Salinas, CA, across the country in **ice-packed** railcars. His company, Bruce Church, Inc., later became Fresh Express.

1948

The widespread use of **vacuum cooling**, a process that vaporizes water to chill greens rapidly, enables growers to ship lettuce across the U.S. without ice, reducing spoilage and improving quality.

1950s & 1960s

In-store **refrigeration** is widely adopted, making lettuce a staple in U.S. grocery stores.

1986

Earthbound Farm launches prewashed, **bagged organic baby greens** in California grocery stores.

1989

Fresh Express begins national distribution of **ready-to-eat bagged salad**. A few years later, the company introduces salad kits that include toppings and dressing—a big step forward in convenience.

1992

Ready Pac introduces "European-style" **salad blends**, which include greens like frisée and radicchio, in California and other select western U.S. states.

2004

Earthbound Farm introduces **plastic clamshell boxes** (similar to the packaging used for strawberries), helping to better protect fragile greens from damage.

2019

Americans eat about **25 pounds of salad greens** each year, split evenly between iceberg and other lettuces. Compare this with 1986, when we ate the same amount but it was almost all iceberg.

Hold your phone's camera over the smart code to see our best salad recipes on [eatingwell.com](http://eatingwell.com)



## DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Who's hungry for a salad? Store-bought salad dressing is convenient, but in a matter of minutes you can make a tasty one from scratch. This vinaigrette formula is endlessly adaptable to suit your taste—just add all the ingredients and shake!

### Master Vinaigrette Recipe

Pour ½ cup oil into a mason jar (we like grapeseed, avocado canola, olive or a nut oil.) Add ¼ cup vinegar or citrus juice, 1-2 tsp. minced garlic, ginger, scallion or shallot, ½-3 tsp. flavoring (total; see the combos at right for inspiration) and ¾ tsp. salt. Shake it up and you're done! Refrigerate the dressing for up to 3 days. (The oil may solidify in the fridge, just leave it at room temperature for about 30 minutes before using.) See page TK for nutrition info.

### 1. Sherry Dijon

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
¼ cup sherry vinegar  
1 teaspoon minced garlic  
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard  
¾ teaspoon salt

### 4. Sesame Ginger

½ cup grapeseed oil  
¼ cup rice vinegar  
2 teaspoons minced scallions  
1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger  
1 teaspoon sesame oil  
1 teaspoon honey  
¾ teaspoon salt

### 2. Fennel Dill

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
¼ cup white-wine vinegar  
1 teaspoon minced garlic  
1 teaspoon minced fresh dill or fennel fronds  
½ teaspoon toasted crushed fennel seeds  
¾ teaspoon salt

### 5. Cumin Lime

½ cup sunflower oil  
¼ cup lime juice  
2 teaspoons minced shallot  
½ teaspoon toasted crushed cumin seeds  
¾ teaspoon salt

### 3. Maple Balsamic

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
¼ cup balsamic vinegar  
2 teaspoons minced shallot  
1 teaspoon pure maple syrup  
¾ teaspoon salt

### 6. Olive Orange

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
¼ cup orange juice  
2 teaspoons minced scallions  
1 teaspoon minced pitted Kalamata olives  
¾ teaspoon salt

## KEEP THE CYCLE GOING

Plastic clamshell containers (often themselves made from recycled plastic) can usually go in your curbside bin, just give them a good rinse first. At the recycling center, clamshells are sorted by plastic number, washed, cut into chunks and washed again to remove any remaining contaminants. The plastic is melted down, then formed into pellets called nurdles, which are sold to plastic producers to begin life anew as everyday items, such as bags, bottles and, yes, more clamshells. Bags from pre-washed salad greens typically can't be recycled because they are coated with a substance that makes them unappealing to recycling companies. But the plastic bags you put a head of lettuce or other produce in can usually be recycled at plastic-film drop-off sites. For recycling rules by ZIP code, visit [earth911.com](http://earth911.com).



**Want to keep your salad greens fresher longer?** Tuck a paper towel inside the package to absorb excess moisture. Greens too dry? Add a slightly damp paper towel to refresh them.

## GREEN UP YOUR DIET

Maybe it's time to tweak the old adage to say, "A salad a day keeps the doctor away." In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention came out with a list of powerhouse

fruits and vegetables—produce that has a strong association with a reduced risk of chronic conditions, such as heart disease and cancer. Many salad greens—from watercress to iceberg

lettuce—made the list. A 2-cup serving of most raw leafy greens typically provides more than 100% Daily Value of vitamin A, a nutrient with eye-protection benefits, and at least 25% DV of potassium, which may help reduce high blood pressure. Plus,

dark leafy greens are one of the best food sources of folate (folic acid), a B vitamin that's necessary for making new cells and is especially important for pregnant women, as adequate levels are necessary to prevent some birth defects. 🥬

FOOD STYLIST: JAMIE KIMM