LEAF IT TO SPINACH

WHEN TO GROW

Spinach is a cool-season crop, so you can grow to harvest in the spring or in the fall. You can also plant in the fall, protect the crops from cold winter weather, and harvest in the spring, but this takes a bit more planning and effort.

In spring, plant seeds outside about 8 weeks before the last frost date (from early February to mid-March, depending on where you live).

In fall, plant seeds outside about 8 weeks from the first frost date (from mid-August to late September, depending on where you live).

If the weather gets too hot, plants will bolt (send up flowers out of the top of the plants) and the leaves will become too bitter to eat. If your spinach bolts, though, don’t worry! It’s an exciting time in the plant’s life cycle—take students out to the garden to observe and talk about it!

WHERE TO GROW

Spinach likes lots of sun (8 to 10 hours a day) and cool, well-drained soil.

You can mulch the soil (with leaves, hay, etc.) around spinach plants to help keep the soil cooler.

Spinach roots will rot if their soil is too soggy—loosen up the soil really well before you plant the seeds. If you want to try growing spinach in a container, make sure excess water is easily drained from the container.

As always, refer to your seed packet for harvesting and plant care information specific to the variety you’ve chosen.
PLANTING

Plant spinach seeds about ¼ inch deep (just cover them with enough soil so they won’t get blown or washed away), in rows 1 foot apart. Spinach grows a deep taproot and needs well-drained soil, so work up the soil to a depth of at least 1 foot before you plant.

Spinach seeds are very small, so it’s easiest to just sprinkle seeds along the row in which you want to grow spinach. When the seedlings are about 4 inches high, thin them to be 4-6 inches apart.

PLANT CARE

As plants grow, remember to mulch the soil around them to keep the soil temperature cool, if necessary.

Spinach grows most quickly in well-drained soil rich in organic matter such as compost or composted manure and with a pH of 6.5 to 7. A soil test might be necessary to figure out soil pH. The University of Georgia offers soil tests for $9.00, visit: http://aesl.ces.uga.edu/scripts/store/

Prevent diseases and pests with crop rotation and good sanitation (weed often, don’t leave dead plants in the garden beds, etc.).

HOW TO HARVEST SPINACH

Harvest spinach early, as mature plants bolt to seed quickly. Cut (with scissors, a small knife, or just pinching off with your fingernails) just below root attachment for “rooted spinach” or cut higher for “clipped spinach”. To harvest “baby leaf spinach,” clip small leaves when plants are 3-5 weeks old, depending on time of year or speed of growth.

Source: Sow True Seeds and Johnny’s Selected Seeds

Spinach Seed Saving How-To:

Step 1 - Allow the growing spinach plants to go to seed. Then, cut the seed stalks with a knife when they are brown and completely dry.

Step 2 - Shake the seed heads over a large bowl to dislodge the seeds. Then, separate the seeds from the chaff and other plant debris.

Step 3 - Place the seeds in a paper bag and fold the bag several times. Then, place the bag into a glass jar and screw the lid tightly.

Step 4 - Store the jar in a cool dry climate until planting season!

Tip: Spinach seeds don’t store well so make sure you use all of your saved spinach seeds the following season.