

# Spinach *Spinacia oleracea*

Spinach thrives in cool weather, and can withstand temperatures as low as 20°F. In some regions of the country it is often more productive in fall than in spring.

**TIP** – Improve your chances of getting good spinach germination in warm, late summer soil by chilling seeds. Freeze them for 2 days, then roll them into a moist paper towel and refrigerate for several more days before planting.

**Location and soil** Sow spring spinach in full sun in rich, well-drained soil. To get fall crops to germinate, plant seeds in the shade of tall plants, such as peppers or eggplants, where the soil remains cooler. When the weather chills, the shade-makers can be pulled out.

**When to Plant** Sow seed directly into the garden in spring, as early as the soil can be worked, and again in late summer, about 8 weeks before the first expected hard frost. In areas with cool summers or mild winters, sow successive crops at regular intervals. Keep in mind, however, that spinach will bolt when day length exceeds about 14 hours, or when daytime temperatures consistently top 75°.

**Seed depth and Spacing** Scatter seeds about an inch apart in wide rows, leaving about 12 inches between rows. Cover the seeds lightly with ½ inch of soil and

gently pat the soil down for good soil to seed contact. Keep the rows evenly moist for fast germination.

**Germination** Spinach will germinate in soils as cool as 40°F, but the time it takes is dependent on the temperature of the soil. At an optimum 50-60°F, germination should occur in 1-2 weeks. When soil temperature exceeds 75°F spinach will germinate poorly, if at all.

**Thinning** Thin seedlings as they grow, first to 2 inches apart, then to 4, and finally to 6-8 inches apart, using the tender thinnings in salads.

**Care** Keep spinach cool as the weather warms by providing shade in the heat of the day. Drip irrigation during hot periods can also cool the soil and help plants survive an early heat spell. In many regions, a fall crop of spinach can be overwintered. Cover the row with straw mulch, and remove it when plants show signs of growth in spring.

**Fertilize** Add compost to the soil at the time of planting, and fertilize with an all-purpose vegetable food or organic kelp fertilizer. Feed overwintered crops with a dilute solution of liquid fertilizer to sustain new growth in spring.

**Harvest** Spinach plants can be harvested all at once, or leaf by leaf. Cut outer leaves at any time, retaining younger leaves for future harvests. This method of harvesting is more practical in cool fall weather than in spring. Cut entire plants when stalks begin to elongate.

**Nutrition** Raw spinach is high in vitamins A and K, and a good source of manganese and folate. A serving of cooked spinach offers those benefits and more, including vitamin B6, iron, magnesium, and potassium.



## Bloomsdale: Heirloom Spinach

Introduced in the late 1800s or early 1900s, open-pollinated Bloomsdale remains a favorite of home gardeners. It is a savoy (crinkled leaf) type spinach with a well-deserved reputation for heat tolerance. Dark green, tender leaves are ready to harvest in about 45 days.