

SPINACH (*Spinacia oleracea*)



Full Sun



Part Shade



SPINACH

One of the most important potherbs cultivated, spinach is rich in vitamins and minerals. It is an especially good source of vitamins A and C.

Planting and culture of Spinach

Any good, well-drained garden soil will suit spinach provided it is not acid. The preferred pH is between 6 and 7. Soils that are more acidic should be limed at whatever rate is indicated by a soil test.

Spinach requires an abundance of plant food, especially nitrogen. The soil should be well spaded to a depth of six inches with well-rotted manure or compost incorporated. Lime only after the manure has been added.

Planting Spinach

Spinach is a cool-season crop which should be planted in the open ground as early in the spring as possible. It can also be planted in the fall, or just before the ground freezes in early winter. Protect it with a mulch of hay, straw or leaves. This crop will be ready to use very early the following spring.

You may also be able to plant during an early February or March thaw. For spring planting, weekly sowings can be made, the last one 50 to 60 days before hot summer weather is expected. One packet of seeds plants 25 feet or one ounce of seed plants 100 feet.

Cover the seeds with 1/2 inch sifted compost and firm well. Rows should be 12 to 15 inches apart, and plants three to four inches apart in the row. If the season is dry, the garden should be thoroughly soaked late in the day. During the growing period the soil should be kept well loosened and weeds kept down.

Spinach diseases

Spinach blight begins as a yellowing and mottling of the leaves and eventually halts the plant's growth. It is a virus disease transmitted from one plant to another by insects. Where it is known to be in the neighborhood, the resistant varieties should be planted.

Harvesting Spinach

Spinach is usually harvested by cutting the whole plant, but it may also be harvested gradually by cutting the outside leaves and allowing the small center leaves to continue growing. The drawback to this method is that the crinkled leaves are difficult to remove without damaging the plant. Plants are considered mature when about six or more leaves have grown to a length of seven inches.

In order to preserve the largest possible amount of the vitamins and minerals in spinach, the leaves should be washed as quickly as possible, without soaking, and dried by whirling in a salad

basket. Water left on the leaves dissolves vitamin C, sugars and minerals, and spoils the flavor of the cooked product.

To cook, heat as quickly as possible in a small amount of water, then reduce the heat and cover, allowing it to steam. The spinach is ready to serve after about five minutes or as soon as the leaves have wilted.

Varieties of Spinach

There are two types: one with crumpled leaves, of which Long Standing Bloomsdale and Virginia Savoy are the most popular; the other with thicker, smoother leaves, as typified by King of Denmark and Nobel. Neither of these go to seed as readily as the others.

Varieties recommended for freezing are: Giant Nobel, Viking, Long Standing Bloomsdale, Northland, and Hybrid No. 7.

Disease-resistant varieties include Winter Bloomsdale, Hybrid No. 7 and Melody Hybrid.

New Zealand spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*) is not true spinach and does not resemble spinach in growth pattern, but when cooked and served there is little difference between them. It has the great merit of flourishing in summer heat, and as its leaves are picked, others grow to replace them. Because of the outer shells, seed should be soaked in water or scored before planting.

Malabar spinach (*Basella alba*) is another excellent substitute for spinach, either cooked or raw. It can be grown on a fence and will thrive in warm weather. It is susceptible to frost injury.