

Spinach

Spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) is an edible flowering plant in the family Chenopodiaceae. It is a hardy annual plant which grows to a height of 8-12 inches. Spinach is thought to have originated in ancient Persia (modern Iran), from which traders carried it to India and China.

There are two types of regular spinach – smooth leaf and savoy leaf. The savoy types have more texture, but soil and sand tend to catch in the crinkles of the leaves. Other types of spinach include perpetual spinach (actually a type of chard), New Zealand spinach, and Malabar spinach. The latter two are in different plant families from spinach. New Zealand spinach prefers hot weather and should be planted after all danger of frost has passed. It will seed itself and come back year after year. Malabar spinach, a vining plant with glossy green leaves, can be harvested throughout the summer, especially if grown in some shade.

Planting:

Direct seed early in the spring after soil temperatures have reached 45°F. Space seeds 3 inches apart in rows, or equidistantly in wide rows or beds. Make several small plantings several days apart.

Cultivation:

- **Fertilizing** – Spinach is a heavy feeder. Incorporate lots of compost or 3 tablespoons of 10-10-10 or equivalent per 10 feet of row prior to planting.
- **Watering** – Keep plants uniformly supplied with moisture for best performance. Water deeply and regularly during dry periods.
- **Weeding** – Remove all young weed seedlings by hand and mulch along each side of the row to keep weed seeds from germinating. Thin by removing (cutting) every other plant in early summer so that spacing is about 6 inches apart. Thinnings may be used in salads or sautéed.

- **Special directions** – Use floating row covers to exclude spinach leaf miners and to speed the growth of the plants. Spinach bolts as the days lengthen and temperatures rise. Make a final harvest when the plants send up their flower stalk. Till under the residue and plant something new. Because spinach tolerates frost, it is a good crop for the fall garden and with protection can be harvested into December. In mild areas, spinach sown in late fall will overwinter and make new growth in the spring.

Harvesting:

Spinach matures in 28-45 days from planting. Use thinnings when small. Cut full-size leaves leaving the crown to re-grow. Approximately yield per 10 foot row is 2 pounds. New Zealand and Malabar spinach can be harvested continuously throughout the summer.

Storage and Preservation: When stored in very cool (32°F), moist (95% RH) conditions, spinach will last 2 to 3 weeks.

Nutrition:

Good source of vitamins A, C, K and folate and the minerals manganese, potassium and iron as well as certain phytonutrients

Preparation and use: Wash thoroughly; if eating raw, pat dry tear into bite-sized pieces. Can be steamed, sautéed, microwaved

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