

How to Grow Spinach

General

The trick to growing spinach is to grow it fast and harvest it fast, and use the right varieties in the right season. Spinach bolts as the days get long and when the weather gets hot. That's why spinach is usually grown in early spring and fall, in low temperatures and short days. Some varieties do a little better in long day, hot conditions. Pick them promptly in hot weather. For summer harvests, try New Zealand Spinach.

Latin

Spinacia oleracea

Family: Amaranthaceae

Difficulty

Easy

Season & Zone

Season: Cool season

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Zone: 2-10

Timing

Spinach does best in cool weather. Direct sow March 1 to April 15. Spinach will bolt once days get long and hot. Some varieties grow enough to harvest before they bolt. For continuous supply, plant every 3 weeks.

Sow again in the middle two weeks of August for a fall crop that, if cut at the soil level, will come back early the following spring. Shade summer-sown seed beds, keep very well watered, and sow more seeds than you need, as warm soil will reduce germination rates marginally. Thin seedlings, and use cloche protection as cold weather approaches. Late sowings like this can be harvested into December - in mild winters if cloche protection is provided.

Optimal soil temperature: 5-20°C (45-70°F). Seeds should sprout in 7-14 days.

Starting

Sow seeds 2cm (1") deep, 10 seeds per 30cm (12"), in rows 30-45cm (12-18") apart. Thin to at least 5-8cm (2-3") between plants, or further if you want larger leaves.

Growing

Ideal pH: 6.0-6.5. This heavy feeder requires rich soil. Dig in ¼-½ cup complete organic fertilizer beneath every 1m (3') of row. Overwintering spinach requires well drained soil.

Harvest

For baby greens, pick when the leaves are 7-10cm (3-4") long. Individual leaves can be picked at anytime, until the plant has started to bolt. Cut the whole spinach plant just above soil level.

Diseases & Pests

Pale, soft tunnels on leaves are probably leaf miner damage. Prevent by covering with floating row cover. You can kill the little insect causing the damage by pinching it inside the leaf. Destroy any affected leaves. Downy mildew is a fungal disease that causes grayish mould on the leaves. To avoid it, provide ample ventilation and avoid overhead watering.

