

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

# Spinach

**S**pinach is a cool-weather leafy green best grown in early spring and fall. Spinach leaves are tender and sweet to eat raw or cooked.

## Varieties

Spinach leaves have two main types: flat and savoy. Savoy spinach has wrinkled leaves, while flat-leaf types do not.

- **Bloomsdale** (savoy) has wrinkled leaves.
- **Corvair** (savoy) has uniform leaves that are dark green.
- **Melody** (savoy) is slower to flower and has less distinct ridges.
- **Space** (flat leaf) has smooth leaves.
- **Tyee** (savoy) leaves are darker green than other varieties.

## How much to plant

Spinach will produce about four to seven pounds of leaves within a 10-foot row of plants. Plant 50 to 60 seeds and thin to about 20 plants. That will produce the same amount as four to seven giant clamshell packages of spinach from the store, or seven to 12 small bags of spinach from the produce section.

Spinach grows fast and is a great succession crop. This means you can plant seeds every week or two, rather than all at once. Succession planting will give you spinach to harvest over many weeks.



**Bloomsdale**  
*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Corvair**  
*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



**Space**  
*Johnny's Selected Seeds*



## How and when to plant

It is best to direct-sow spinach seeds into the garden. Space rows of spinach 12 to 14 inches apart. Plant seeds two to three inches away from each other, at a depth of one-quarter inch to one-half inch. Pat down the soil firmly after you plant. If crowded, you can thin spinach once it is four to six inches tall. You can use the thinned plants in salads and soup.

You can also grow spinach in pots or containers. Choose containers at least six to eight inches deep and wide, or plant in a long trough. Spinach likes a sunny location but can also grow in areas with some shade.

You can plant spinach early in spring and again in the fall. When summer gets hot, spinach will bolt. Bolting is when a plant sends up flowers and makes seeds. This takes nutrients from the leaves, and they will taste bitter.

| Spinach Planting           |   |                  |
|----------------------------|---|------------------|
| <b>Rows</b>                | 12–14 inches apart                                |                  |
| <b>Spacing</b>             | Seeds 2–3 inches apart (thin to 4–6 inches apart) |                  |
| <b>Safe Planting Dates</b> | <b>Spring</b>                                     | <b>Fall</b>      |
| Eastern Kentucky           | March 10–April 30                                 | Aug. 1–15        |
| Central Kentucky           | March 1–April 1                                   | Aug. 1–Sept. 1   |
| Western Kentucky           | Feb. 15–April 15                                  | Aug. 15–Sept. 15 |



Spinach seedlings

Howard Schwartz, Colorado University, Bugwood.org, CC BY 3.0



Damping-off in a beet seedling

Mariusz Sobieski, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0

## Pests and diseases

The main problem for spinach is damping-off. Plant fungicide-treated seeds in well-draining soil to prevent this problem.

Aphids will attack spinach. Remove damaged leaves or spray the aphids off the leaves with water. Many insects are normal predators of aphids and will eat them off the leaves.



Aphid on spinach

*Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY 3.0*

## Harvesting

To harvest, cut the whole plant to the soil surface once the spinach reaches four to six inches across, or cut older, larger leaves and let smaller leaves grow. If you do succession plantings, some plants will be ready earlier while others will finish later.

Wash spinach well before cooking or eating. The wrinkled spinach leaves can trap dirt.

## Serving

Spinach is packed with vitamins A and C, as well as calcium and iron. Spinach is tasty in almost any salad or mixed with fruit such as strawberries or peaches. You can also mix it with rich cheeses or bacon. You can add cooked spinach to many pastas, like lasagna or alfredo. Spinach can be added to a smoothie, stuffed in a sandwich or wrap, mixed with eggs, or put in a quiche. Its mild, sweet flavor will work in almost any recipe that has greens.



Spinach salad with strawberries, Parmesan cheese, olive oil, and walnuts

## Storing

Store dry spinach leaves for a few days in the refrigerator in a container or plastic bag.

## Clean up

Remove any leftover roots or plants once they bolt or a hard frost kills them. Compost healthy plants and throw away any diseased plants.

## Summary

### Varieties

Varieties that grow well in Kentucky include Space, Corvair, Melody, Tyee, and Bloomsdale.

### How much to plant?

Plant a 10-foot row of spinach for a small family.

### How and when to plant?

Spinach is a cool-weather plant that you can grow in spring and again in fall. Plant seeds one-quarter inch to one-half inch deep, firming down the soil. Succession plant to have spinach for several weeks.

### Pests and diseases

Spinach can get damping-off. To help prevent this, plant fungicide-treated seeds in well-draining soil. Aphids can also bother spinach, but they can be removed with a hard spray of water.

### Harvesting

Cut the whole plant to the soil once leaves are four to six inches across or only remove large leaves.

### Serving

Eat spinach raw or cooked. Use spinach in salads, pastas, egg dishes, or any recipe that uses greens.

### Storing

Store dry spinach leaves in a bag or container in the refrigerator. Spinach will keep for a few days.

### Clean up

Remove plants that bolt or plants that die from hard frost. Pull out plants and compost or throw them away.

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