

# Spinach



Spinach is one of the most satisfying cool-weather crops to grow, producing large yields of vitamin-rich, dark green leaves that are excellent for salads and for cooking. Since both hot weather and long days trigger spinach to bolt (send up a seed stalk) quickly, the secret to success with this crop is to start sowing seeds as soon as possible in spring; to make small, frequent plantings during late spring and summer; and to concentrate on autumn as the season for the main crop.

## **Planting**

Spinach does best when growing in moist, nitrogen-rich soil. Spinach plants form a deep taproot; for best growth, loosen the soil at least 1 foot deep before planting. Sow spinach seed as early as six weeks before the last frost or as soon as you can work the soil. Prepare the soil the previous autumn, and you'll be able to drop the seeds in barely thawed ground come spring. Sow seed heavily, because the germination rate drops to about 50% in warm weather.

Overcrowding stunts growth and encourages plants to go to seed. To avoid crowding, thin seedlings to four to six inches apart once they have at least two true leaves.

Since cultivating or hand pulling weeds can harm spinach roots, it's best to spread a light mulch of hay, straw, or grass clippings along the rows to suppress weeds instead. Water stress will encourage plants to bolt, so provide enough water to keep the soil moist but not soggy.

### **Harvesting**

In six to eight weeks you can start harvesting from any plant that has at least six three or four inch-long leaves. Carefully cutting the outside leaves will extend the plants' productivity.

Harvest the entire crop at the first sign of bolting by using a sharp knife to cut through the main stem just below the soil surface.

