



Champaign County Juvenile Detention Center Master Gardener Community Garden

Spinach Lesson

Time

15 – 30 minutes

Overview

Spinach is a popular vegetable grown in the garden in the United States. This lesson explores the spinach plant.

Objectives

Students will:

- Discover how to plant, care for, and harvest spinach.
- Learn about the nutritional value of spinach and how to prepare it in tasty ways.

Supplies

- Spinach
- Ingredients for salad: tomato, sweet pepper, cucumber, etc.

Snack

- Green salad
- Ranch dressing
- Juice/water

Activity

Planting, harvesting, and tending spinach

Sources

<http://www.urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/spinach>

Spinach

DO: Begin by introducing yourself and the other Master Gardeners by first names.

SAY: Good afternoon. We are a group of Master Gardeners of Champaign County here to provide a gardening program today at JDC. In the fall and winter months we come every other week to give a lesson on plants, eating right, and taking care of the planet. In the spring and summer we work together with you to plant and maintain a vegetable and flower garden in the outside rec area. (depending on time... I became interested in gardening because... Does anyone else have gardening experience or a relative who gardens?)

Today's lesson will be... I am... with other volunteers... (introduce themselves).
(Participants may introduce themselves also.)

Today we are going to talk about a popular garden green, spinach.

Spinach growing in the garden is a welcome sign of spring. Spinach can be grown as a spring and a fall crop.

When to Plant

The first planting can be made as soon as the soil is prepared in the spring. If the soil was prepared in the fall, seeds can be broadcast over frozen ground or snow cover in late winter and they will germinate as the soil thaws.

Plant successive crops for several weeks after the initial sowing to keep the harvest going until hot weather arrives. Seed spinach again in late summer for fall and early winter harvest. With mulch, borderline gardeners should be able to coax seedlings through the winter for an early spring harvest.

Spinach can be grown in hotbeds, sunrooms, or protected cold frames for winter salad. The crinkled leaved varieties tend to catch soil during rainfalls. Plant a plain leaved variety to avoid "gritty" spinach when chewed.

Spacing and Depth

Sow 12 to 15 seeds per foot of row. Cover 1/2 inch deep. When the plants are one inch tall, thin to 2 to 4 inches apart. Closer spacing (no thinning) is satisfactory when the entire plants are to be harvested.

The rows may be as close as 12 inches apart, depending upon the method used for keeping weeds down. In beds, plants may be thinned to stand 4 to 6 inches apart in all directions. Little cultivation is necessary.

Care

Spinach grows best with ample moisture and a fertile, well-drained soil. Under these conditions, no supplemental fertilizer is needed. If growth is slow or the plants are light green, side-dress with nitrogen fertilizer.

Harvesting

The plants may be harvested whenever the leaves are large enough to use (a rosette of at least five or six leaves). Late thinnings may be harvested as whole plants and eaten. Cut the plants at or just below the soil surface. Spinach is of best quality if cut while young.

Two or three separate seedings of short rows can provide harvest over an extended period. Some gardeners prefer to pick the outer leaves when they are 3 inches long and allow the younger leaves to develop for later harvest. Harvest the entire remaining crop when seed stalk formation begins because leaves quickly deteriorate as flowering begins.

Common Problems

Cucumber mosaic virus causes a condition in spinach called blight. Downy mildew and other fungal leaf diseases are a problem, especially in seasons that are wet, humid or both. Some resistance is available through variety selection.

Raised beds create excellent air and water drainage in the spinach bed, which also helps prevent infections.

Nutritional Value and Health Benefits

It is a source of Vitamin A. It is rich in iron, calcium and protein