

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

September 2024

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Horticultural Column Fall Planting

By Harriet Wetstone

I think one of the most magical parts to having a garden, other than watching the miracle of seeds hatching and plants unfolding, is being able to pick armloads of plants to use: to put in vases, into cooking pots, directly into your mouth! Even though I have not very much direct sun in my woodland edge type of garden, I am so glad that I can grow herbs and leafy greens. Now, in September, while I am appreciating the almost sudden transition from summer and worrying about heat and humidity to fall, with cooler temperatures and lower humidity. I also appreciate that some of the leafy greens I love to grow, and eat, can be planted now for harvesting into the fall and late fall.



So, I thought I would explore types of spinach suitable for fall planting. I have not bothered planting spinach in the spring, because I have found for us here in the Berkshires, the spinach has hardly come up that it gets too warm, and it wilts, or bolts, or both. But fall planting makes sense to me.

Spinach (*spinach oleracea*) is a leafy green flowering plant that is native to central and Western Asia. It is of the family *Amaranthaceae*. Which means that spinach is related to beets, also of the family *Amarantaceae*. Interesting! Different varieties of spinach vary a good deal in taste. The familiar spinach texture comes from its high oxalate content, which reduces when spinach is steamed. Oxalates have a bad reputation as kidney stone culprits, but in general, oxalates are part of our natural metabolic processes and not generally an issue. Rhubarb, beets, Swiss chard, sweet potatoes, and chocolate are also high in oxalates. However, Spinach is a nutritional powerhouse as we all know, high in vitamins, nutriments, and fiber, more flavorful than lettuce, but not as bitter as kale.

There are three types of spinach: smooth leaf, semi savoyed and savoyed. The smooth leaved is the most common. The complaint I have always had about growing spinach is that the leaves are small. Now I have discovered that there is Giant Winter Spinach (available from Johnny's and from High Mowing seeds). Giant Winter Spinach is also known as Bloomsdale Long Standing. It is cold-hardy, and forms large dark green leaves that are slightly crinkled in texture with a mild, sweet flavor. And it is said that harvesting single leaves rather than pulling the whole bunch promotes new growth and extends harvesting.

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Thanks to: <https://growagoodlife.com/quick-growing-vegetables-fall-garden/>;
<https://www.grit.com/farm-and-garden/crops/fall-radish-types-zm0z22sozawar/>;
<https://www.epicgardening.com/spinach-companion-plants/>. -and more!

Next, I wondered about companion planting for fall spinach. I loved the suggestions, among them radishes, one of the fastest growers, and nasturtiums. Seems the nasturtiums are not only tasty and gorgeous, but they also deter pests that munch on spinach. I might add that I find nasturtium leaves are a tasty addition to spinach salads. I love the flowers as well, but I find often people are put off the idea of eating them, and their visual appeal is spoiled by dressing.

Radishes, by the way, are also native to Southeast or Central Asia, and they belong to the cruciferae or mustard family. French breakfast is one of the traditional varieties, but there is a wide variety of radishes, from black, to rainbow. Radishes are also very nutritious, sources of Vitamin C and B6, as well as calcium and potassium, niacin, etc.

While I have focused on spinach and radishes for fall planting, any quickly maturing crop is a good idea; researching fall planting I found suggestions such as micro greens, arugula, dill, beets, baby carrots and bok chop. All of these crops are excellent choices for container gardens. This year, I grew my string beans in window boxes set on my deck railing, and they did wonderfully. Now, I am pulling them to make way for spinach and radishes. I will replace the soil with fresh compost soil and be ready to go.