



# Planting Leafy Vegetables

Lettuce, Spinach, Swiss chard, etc.

Quality lettuce, spinach, chard and other salad crops are the mark of a great gardener. Quality is based on the gardener's ability to match ideal conditions for rapid growth, including water, fertilizer, space, and temperature.

## ***At a Glance***

**Soil:** rich, heavy in organic matter

**Water:** keep moist with 1-1 ½ inches of water per week (including rain)

**Temperature: hardy (lettuce & spinach)**-daytime temperature down to 40 degrees; may survive a frost

**Semi-hardy (chard)** - minimum temperature between 40-50, less tolerant of frost

**Mulch:** organic, such as dry grass clippings, conserves moisture & controls weeds

**Spacing:** thin crops to reduce competition for nutrients

- **Soils-** a rich soil, high in organic matter, is necessary for quality.
- **Mulch-** Organic mulch (like dry grass clippings) reduces summer soil temperatures producing sweeter produce, conserves moisture, and controls weeds. Weeding by cultivation will damage surface roots.
- **Temperatures**
  - **Hardy Vegetables** grow best with daytime temperatures as low as 40 degrees and may survive a frosty nip. These include lettuce and spinach.
  - **Semi-Hardy** Vegetables grow with minimum temperatures of 40 to 50 degrees, but are less tolerant of a frosty night. These include Swiss chard.
- **Irrigation-** Keep soil moist with 1-1½ inches of water per week (including rain). If the crop gets dry, it will become tough and stringy.
- **Spacing-** Thin the crop to reduce competition for nutrients, moisture, light, and space.
- **Planting for fall harvest-** Plant lettuce and spinach in

mid to late summer to produce exceptional harvest quality during cool fall weather. It can also be planted mid-fall for extra-early spring crops. Cover the small seedlings with organic mulch for winter protection.

- **Harvest**
  - **Collards, and Swiss chard-** Can pull leaves until the ground freezes. Twist off outer leaves. Centers will renew.
  - **Leaf lettuce-** harvest mature leaves from the outside so centers continue to renew.
  - **Heads of lettuce-** Harvesting heads of lettuce should be done by cutting them away from the stalk when the head is still firm. Use a sharp knife and simply make a clean cut below the head through the stem.
  - **Spinach-** The whole plant can be harvested at once, and cut at the base, or leaves may be picked off plants one layer at a time, giving inner layers more time to develop.



David Whiting, C. O. (2011, July). *Colorado Master Gardener Notes #719*. Retrieved from Colorado State University Extension: [www.cmg.colostate.edu](http://www.cmg.colostate.edu)  
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