

The Garden \$aver

Welcome to Issue 1 of the Garden \$aver! This issue kicks off another growing season for Grow Well Missouri. Throughout the season, we'll do our best to offer timely and practical advice for gardeners at all levels – whether you are brand new to gardening or have been gardening your whole life. Have an idea for us? Please let your local Grow Well Missouri volunteers know about it or contact Bill McKelvey, Project Coordinator, at 573-882-4973 or McKelveyWA@missouri.edu. Good gardening to you!

Spring is Near

The first official day of spring is March 20, the Spring Equinox, when the length of day and night is about the same. This also marks nearly the earliest you can begin planting **cool season crops** in the garden. For most areas of the state, it is best to wait until late March or early April.

One thing to think about when starting to plant outside is **soil temperature**. Vegetable seeds sprout within a range of temperatures, and each has an ideal temperature when it will sprout the fastest. See the chart below for a list of **Cool Season Vegetables** and the best soil temperatures for sprouting.

Vegetable	Ideal Temp (F)	Range (F)
Beet	75	65-85
Carrot	80	45-84
Kale/Collards/Mustard	85	45-95
Lettuce	75	40-80
Pea	75	40-75
Radish	85	45-90
Spinach	70	45-75
Swiss Chard	85	50-85
Turnip	85	60-105

The main way to know the soil temperature is to use a simple cooking for food safety thermometer (*Only use it for this purpose. Don't reuse it in the kitchen*). Insert to a depth of 2 inches during the middle of the day and record the temp for a few days. Then take the average. Soil temps in the 40s-50s generally mean it is safe to plant lettuce, peas, carrots, radishes, spinach, kale, collards, mustard, and Swiss chard. Temps in the 60s are good for beets and turnips.

You can also check the soil temp in your county (or nearby) at this MU Extension website:

<http://agebb.missouri.edu/weather/reports/soilTemp2.asp>.

Spring Garden Prep

Spring into action **before** the garden season to make your planting easier.

- **Do some planning** and make a rough sketch of where and how much to plant. Don't forget to leave room for warm season/summer vegetables.
- **Get your tools in order.** Clean and sharpen hand tools. If you have a tiller, make sure it is ready to go when you need it.
- **Rake off old, dead plants and debris.** This will allow the soil in your garden to warm and dry faster.
- **Get compost**, well-aged manure, or check your own compost pile to see if yours is ready. Keep this on the side of the garden until you are ready to dig or till.

When you are ready to dig in, be sure to **test the soil for wetness** by picking up some soil and making a soft fist. If the soil breaks apart when you poke at it, it is ready to be worked. If it stays in a clump, the soil is too wet. Give it a few days to dry.

Use compost when you work up the garden. Spread a 2-3 inch layer across the planting area. Mix it in. It doesn't have to be dug in deeply.

For those with soil in good condition, or with existing gardens, **minor tilling and digging may be all that is needed**. See what you can do without doing a major till or dig. You might be surprised.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Growing Spinach

Spring is for spinach. This vegetable is relatively easy to grow and can be cooked or used raw in many dishes. It is one of the earlier vegetables to plant. Think mid- to late-March for Central Missouri; late-March to early-April for the Ozarks and North, South Central, and Southwest Missouri. It grows well in soil that has compost or aged manure added.

Planting: Plant spinach seed ½ inch deep.

- **Traditional in-ground garden with rows** – Space seeds approx. 3 inches apart within the row. Space rows 12-18 inches apart.
- **Raised bed garden** – Use directions above for a traditional garden or scatter the seeds over the surface of the soil and gently rake or chop them in. The seeds need to be covered with soil. Once the seeds have sprouted and grown for a couple of weeks, remove enough plants so that the remaining plants are about 8-12 inches apart on all sides.
- **Container garden** – Spinach is great for containers. Use the seed scattering method described above.



Harvesting: Pick or pinch off individual leaves anytime they are more than 3 inches long. Leave the rest of the plant to grow. You can also harvest whole plants once the largest leaves are 3-5 inches long. Use a knife to cut the base of the plant just beneath the surface of the soil. The plant will not regrow in this case.

Small Plot Gardening

If you garden in a small raised bed or container, you may be able to space your vegetables closer than what is suggested on most seed packets. Directions on seed packets are usually for more traditional gardens with rows and room to walk between rows.

With small plots or containers, people often use **square foot or intensive gardening** methods to save space and get more plants per square foot. Look for books at your local library or tips on the internet.

With these methods, you'll need to provide more water and compost/fertilizer. This is because plants will be crowded and there will be more competition for water and nutrients. You'll also need to weed by hand since there may not be room to use a hoe or other weeding tool.

Taste it at home! Spinach Scramble

ALL YOU NEED:

- Fresh spinach (about ¼ pound per serving)
- 2 eggs per serving
- ¼ onion per serving
- 2 cloves minced garlic per serving
- Vegetable oil for light pan frying
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: Grated cheese and herbs

ALL YOU DO:

- Wash spinach by dunking in cold water. Drain in a colander. Chop. Then, chop onion and garlic.
- Heat one tablespoon of oil in pan over medium heat. Add onion and cook for a couple of minutes.
- Add garlic and cook for one minute.
- Add chopped spinach and cook for a couple of minutes until it is wilted.
- Crack eggs into veggies. Mix and cook until firm.
- Add salt, pepper, cheese, and herbs to taste.

