



MALABAR SPINACH



FAMILY

Basellaseae

BOTANICAL NAME

Basella spp.

CULTIVARS

Red Malabar spinach (*B. rubra*)
Green Malabar spinach (*B. alba*)

COMMON NAMES

Indian spinach, Ceylon spinach, Basella, Vine spinach, Espinaca de Malabar

Peter A. Y. Ampim and Dania Rivera-Ocasio

CULTIVATION

PERIOD

Spring (after last frost) through fall

PROPAGATION

Sow seeds or establish using seedlings under appropriate conditions. Requires temperature above 10°C (50°F to germinate). Germinates 14-21 days after planting. Seed scarification hastens germination. Soaking the seeds in water overnight may also help enhance germination. Grow seedlings 5-6 weeks before transplanting. Transplant seedlings 15 cm. (6 in.) apart on beds. For direct seeding, sow to a depth of about a 0.6 cm. (1/4 in.) and 5 cm. (2 in.) apart on a bed and thin to 15 cm. (6 in.) after germination.

GROWING CONDITIONS

Soils: Loves organic matter rich and fertile soils. Soil pH: Prefers slightly acidic soil (pH 6.0-6.8). Requires constant moisture to prevent early flowering which tends to make the leaves taste bitter.

CARING FOR THE GROWING PLANT

Trellis, fertilize, water, control insects, and keep weeds away. Rotate with other crops to minimize disease occurrence.

DAYS TO MATURITY

About 85 days after seeding

HARVEST / YIELD POTENTIAL

Cut the leaves and tender stems with a pair of scissors throughout the season as necessary.

AREAS COMMONLY CULTIVATED

Cold climates and the tropics

PLANT DESCRIPTION

Has glossy dark green leaves and red/purple or green stems depending on cultivar. It is a vine and climbs. It is a warm season plant and loves heat.

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GROWING STEPS

Buy seeds from a reliable source and start seedlings indoors or in a greenhouse if you want to use seedlings to begin your garden. Prepare your site or containers. Plant or transplant when conditions are optimum. Water as needed. Mulch and trellis. Feed with fertilizer when plants are grown. Control weeds, diseases and insects. Harvest when mature.

POTENTIAL PESTS AND DISEASES

PESTS

Sensitive to nematodes

DISEASES

Cercospora beticola. If fungal infection occurs, remove the damaged leaves to prevent spreading.

CULINARY USES

Leaves and young stems can be used in salads, soups and stir-fries. It tastes like Swiss chard but has a milder flavor.

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

High dietary fiber, low calories, and vitamins A, B₁, B₂, B₃, B₅, B₆, B₉, C, E, and K. Also contains calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, and other antioxidants.

REPORTED HEALTH BENEFITS

Helps with sleep disorders, child growth and development, and prevents anemia. Improves cardiovascular and sexual health. Strengthens the immune system and fights aging. Helps in digestion and reduces bloating and cramping. It is a laxative and has anti-inflammatory, antiulcer, nephro-protective, and wound healing properties.

REFERENCES

Adhikari, R., H.N. Naveen Kumar, S.D. Shruthi. 2012. A review of medicinal Importance of *Basella alba* L. IJPSSDR 4(2):110-114.

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