Spinach loves cool weather, so growing it in Tennessee can be tricky. It certainly tricked me, but eventually I caught on.

In the Midwest, we always planted spinach in spring, as soon as the ground can be worked. But that doesn't work here.

Even an early March planting of spinach suffers from those hot April days, which make it want to bolt. Warmth is not for spinach, and up goes the flower and seed stalk. The season for eating spring planted spinach is way too short.

So we plant in late October or early November. The short cool days sprout it, but that's about all.

After narrow, grass-like seed leaves appear, it gets a few true leaves and then remains dormant through the cold part of winter.

I broadcast a pound of spinach seed over two beds, each four foot wide. One was 300 feet long, and in late December we covered it with reemay, a plant bed cloth. The other bed was about half as long and did not get covered.

By early March we were picking leaves. This winter wasn't super cold, and the uncovered bed did fine. It's great to be harvesting it at the time I used to be planting spinach.

A good, humus-rich soil will easily row spinach. A slight bit of weeding and soil loosening after winter helps it along. I don't get too crazy, though, as it won't last long and will be turned under for a May crop of beans of squash.

Bloomsdale Long Standing is the standard variety, and the one I like best. With the traditional, dark green, savoyed leaves, it lends itself to many recipes. The French likened spinach to virgin beeswax, because its unassuming flavor is impressionable and didn't overwhelm the dish it is used in.

We find it a delicious alternative to kale, which we love but has been our only green through most of the winter.

Oxalic acid is found in spinach, and also in chard and beet greens. It's not good to eat too much of it. Even fall-planted spinach has a short season, so I don't worry about overeating it. Spinach is generally regarded as being healthy for you, just ask Popeye.

I like I in omelets and raw in salads. It doesn't take long to cook. I rinse it three times (the low lying leaves get dirty) and then cook it quickly in the water that's left on them. Two or three minutes is all it needs to wilt down. I also like I sautéed with garlic.

We are probably at the southern limit of where spinach grows. March is perfect for it. That is, perfect for growing it.

Get it planted in the fall and overwinter it, so by March it is already established and ready to produce. April's warm weather will put an end to spinach, but a beginning to may more great things to come.