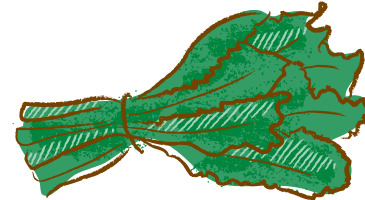


Reading with children can improve their language, literacy, and social-emotional skills, increasing their knowledge of the world around them. With the right book choices, reading can introduce children to healthy eating habits too!



### SYLVIA'S SPINACH

by Katherine Pryor



#### What It's All About

Spinach is Sylvia's least favorite food. She is very disappointed when her class grows a garden and she's responsible for growing the spinach! Maybe growing her own spinach will help change her mind about this leafy green vegetable.

#### Dig into the Story

Develop children's comprehension of the story by discussing higher-level information (e.g., link characters' feelings to their actions and/or events in the story, predict what might happen, summarize chunks of text). Use prompts throughout the story, such as:

- *Sylvia is not happy that she is responsible for growing the spinach for her class' garden. What would you say to her to make her feel better? What vegetable would you want to grow?*
- *It's hard waiting for the plants to sprout. The peas, cucumbers, and squash all sprouted before Sylvia's spinach. I wonder if it will ever sprout. Let's keep reading to find out what happens.*
- *I see that Sylvia is going to try some spinach! I don't know if she's going to like it or not. She smells the spinach, she licks it, and then bites the leaf in half! She's surprised that she likes it! What is a new food you've tried and decided you like?*

#### Discover a World of Words

Throughout the story, introduce new vocabulary words using gestures, tone of voice, pointing to illustrations, or providing brief explanations. Examples include:

- *pluck*: to pull (something) quickly to remove
- *announcement*: a written or spoken statement that tells people about something.
- *sprout*: to produce new leaves, buds
- *nibble*: to eat slowly or with small bites

#### Make Connections Beyond the Book

After reading the story, make connections to an aspect of the child's real life by:

- Planting spinach just like Sylvia! Take spinach seeds and plant them in a small container indoors. Wait for them to sprout and then transfer them to an outdoor garden.
- Trying spinach different ways. Eat spinach with eggs, in soup, and on a sandwich. Brainstorm other combinations to see which one tastes the best.
- Saying yes to something new! Sylvia did not want to try spinach but when she did, she really liked it! Find something new to try together! You might just like it.

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Definitions taken from: Learners Dictionary. (2016). (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated) Retrieved from LearnersDictionary.com.



## Together Time Activity

### GROW YOUR OWN SPINACH

Spinach is an easy vegetable to grow indoors or outdoors. It typically does best in sunny, cool weather (fall/winter), but can grow in a wide range of climates and soil types. Usually, the seeds will germinate in just 10-14 days, and spinach can be harvested within just 6-8 weeks!



**Spinach grows best in a raised garden bed or a container.** The soil needs to be cool (around 75 degrees or lower) for the seeds to successfully germinate. Keep the soil moist but not soggy.

**To plant (or start) your spinach indoors:** Make sure your seeds will receive the appropriate amount of light. Containers can be placed in a windowsill for direct sunlight, or purchase an inexpensive, plug-in grow light from the hardware store. Choose containers that are at least 6-12" wide and plant seeds at least 1-2" apart and about ¾" deep in the soil. After the seeds sprout (usually about 2 weeks) you have the option to transplant them outside to finish growing, or transplant them to larger containers as they continue to grow.

**To plant your spinach outdoors:** First check a garden zone map from an organization such as the American Horticultural Society ([www.ahs.org](http://www.ahs.org)) and follow their recommendations for when to plant, and the appropriate location and amount of sunlight. When planting spinach seeds in rows in a garden bed, space them about 14-18" apart and put the seeds at a depth of about ¾".

### Talking Points:

- Explain how plants can have edible parts both above and below the ground. Which part of the spinach plant do you eat? Find some other plants outdoors and identify the parts together with your child.
- Discuss the sequence in which the parts of a plant grow (seed, roots, stem, fruit, flower). Which comes first, which comes last?
- Explain how seeds from one plant can spread and grow another plant (falling to the ground, traveling by wind or water, carried by birds, etc.).
- Explain that we also use plant parts, especially leaves and seeds, to make dried and ground spices to flavor foods.