



As you sow, so shall you thin

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Early spring radishes are wonderfully flavorful without being too eye watering hot. Ours have been ready to eat for a couple of weeks already and wow, the rewards of gardening.

Radishes are cold-blooded crops and can take the cold and the snow. In fact that is why they stay mild for it is the sun that makes them sharp.

There are people who say, "I can't grow radishes. Mine never get big." Well, there's a reason.

Like most jobs in life there's always something that needs to be done that is not the fun part. In gardening it's thinning out the rows.

Harvesting radishes is fun, but you must sacrifice a few to enjoy your harvest. That means thinning. Unless you can seed a properly spaced row of radishes, lettuces, spinach, carrots or anything with a small seed you must learn how to thin.

My very first garden experiences with thinning were painful. I felt that if that radish was growing, it deserved to live. But, as you know that is not possible, you must thin those plants so each one has room to grow.

So buy lots of seed and be sure and plant successive rows so that your radish or lettuce crop will last for a weeks and weeks -- at least until it begins to warm up. When the weather turns hot and evenings stay warm, the spinach begins to bolt and the lettuce turns bitter.

This winter was open enough to get into the garden in March. I used raised beds at home and can work a row or two anytime I can get into the garden from the house. So I do.

I sow the seed and let it go. There's enough moisture in the early spring to keep from breaking out the hose. When the seeds sprout and leaves begin to form, you must begin to thin.

Now don't get too crazy with your thinning right off the bat and do not go by the back of the packet. If you research the "French Intensive Method" of sowing, you can sprinkle seed everywhere and harvest it as it matures. The heck with four-inch spacing with 1.5 feet between rows; I have never used that information. If everyone garden according to the spacing on the back of a seed packet, we would all need bigger gardens.

A good rule of thumb is to plant the rows the same distance apart as the required spacing. And I do. To begin thinning, I use a small manicure scissors and snip between the healthy plants. This does a couple of things. The healthy seedlings have space to grow, the root of the sacrificed plant gives back to the soil and clipping doesn't disturb the soil around the root of the seedling next to it.

As the radishes get bigger, I begin to pull the littler ones and eat them. In a couple of days or so, the healthy happy ones with room to grow will do just that. So remember as you sow, so must you thin and your carrots,

beets, lettuce, spinach and radishes will reward with abundance if you do.

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