

Thin Turnips and Braise With Spinach

Edible Schoolyard Pittsburgh



Spring
Early May

Materials

- Propane camping stove and long lighter, large saucepan w/ cover, ¼ stick butter (or 3 T olive oil), 2 cups water, salt and pepper
- *Harvest materials:* harvest bins, 2 buckets filled with water for cleaning, small baskets for cleaned produce, pruning scissors
- *Prep and serving materials:* long work table, salad spinner, wooden spoon, compostable plates and forks, hand sanitizer, napkins

Preparation

- Identify a suitable spot in the garden or outdoor classroom for the camping stove and food prep workspace
- Set up the camping stove and arrange prep materials on the work table. Fill (2) 5-gallon plastic buckets with water for cleaning produce. Place filled buckets, extra baskets, and pruning scissors in food prep area.
- Place harvest bins by turnip and spinach beds

PROCEDURE

Part 1: Harvest Turnips and Spinach

- “By now, our plants are beginning to take up more space and the garden beds are becoming crowded. At this point, it’s necessary to thin the garden beds. By removing weaker plants from the soil, we free up more resources and space for the stronger plants to thrive.” As a class, visit the turnip and spinach bed(s). “Today we are going to thin the turnip and spinach beds. Instead of sending these thinned plants to the compost pile, we are going to prepare a fresh snack of lightly braised turnips and spinach.”
- At each garden bed, identify the featured plant and demonstrate how to properly harvest it. “First, identify the biggest, healthiest-looking plants in the garden bed -- we want to keep these in the ground. Then, carefully remove the smaller plants in between the stronger ones, leaving 3—4 inches between plants.”
 - *Turnips:* Grasp the plant at its base and lightly rock back and forth to loosen it from the soil. Leave the entire plant intact and place in a harvest bin.
 - *Spinach:* Grasp the plant at its base and remove it from the soil with roots still intact. Place the entire plant in the harvest bin. The roots will be removed after washing.
- Split students into two groups and assign one adult leader to each. Arrange students evenly around garden beds. “Each of you will harvest one plant from the garden bed. Wait until everyone is ready before harvesting.” First, have students carefully examine their part of the garden bed and identify the strongest-looking plants. Then, have students identify a smaller plant to harvest by pointing at that plant. Once everyone has selected a plant, circle around the garden bed to check their work. Finally, carefully remove plants and place them in bins.

Part 2: Wash, Prep, and Serve

- As a group, move to the food prep area and demonstrate how to clean produce. For turnips, first remove wilted or damaged leaves, then dunk the entire plant in the bucket and scrub to clean. Place in separate basket. For spinach, hold the plant by its roots and submerge in water. Once clean, use the pruning scissors to remove roots. Place clean leaves in a salad spinner to remove excess water then transfer to a basket.
- As students clean produce, fire up the camping stove. Heat a saucepan and add a little butter (or olive oil) and water. Place the cleaned turnips in the pan, cover, and stew until softened (about 10 minutes). As turnips cook, select students to distribute hand sanitizer and set the table. Select others to construct centerpieces/bouquets.
- At the last minute add the spinach. Cook for 1 minute more until wilted. Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper. Serve. Place food scraps in the garbage and plates/forks in the compost pile (if large enough).

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Food & Technology

ENGAGE

Gather in a large circle in a spacious area of the garden. “Today, we will be harvesting two different plants. As you know, plants begin their lives as tiny seeds.” Introduce seeds or Seed ID cards. “Both plants come from different plant families, so their seeds look very different.” Pass around seeds for students to examine. When finished, compare seed size and appearance. Collect seeds and lead students to the first bed. “Do you know which seed produced these plants?” Display the corresponding seed to the class. Move the next garden bed and repeat. Transition to harvest activity.

Objectives

- Students will understand the importance of minimizing waste in the garden by using every plant part, whether as a food source or as an addition to the compost pile.
- Students will understand the connection between healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy food, and healthy bodies.

EXPLAIN

Use every part!

Periodically thinning plants from our garden beds is an important part of successful gardening. In doing so, we free up more space and resources for the bigger, stronger plants to survive. With increased access to sun, soil, water, and air, these plants have a greater chance of producing an abundant harvest.

Even though the smaller plants are no longer welcome in our garden beds, that doesn't mean that they have to go to waste. Young seedlings are especially tender and packed full of nutrients – it would be a shame to see them end up in the compost pile when they would be much better served as a delicious snack! Turnip and spinach thinnings are great eaten raw or cooked, as are kale, lettuce, chard, and beet seedlings.

Healthy plants, healthy people.

Now successfully established in the garden, young seedlings are busy converting sunlight into usable energy and pulling up essential nutrients from the soil. During this phase of plant growth, available nutrients are at their peak. Consuming plants while they are still young and tender has many benefits. First, their taste and texture can't be beat! Young turnip seedlings have a crisp texture and a slightly sweet, snappy flavor. Baby spinach leaves are especially plump and tender, even more so when harvested in cooler morning temperatures. When eaten immediately after harvesting, young plants have the added benefit of exceptional nutrition, due to the fact that their storehouse of nutrients has yet to break down. Fresh food = maximum nutrition and happy, healthy bodies!

ADDITIONAL CONTENT INTEGRATION *(see previous page)*

Prepare Seed ID cards. Cut paper stock into 4X6-inch pieces. Use glue to attach seeds in the center of the cards. Label cards with the seed name and plant family.

Additional Materials

- Extra turnip and spinach seed in a small container
OR
- Seed ID cards (seeds, paper stock, scissors, and glue)

EVALUATE

Journal prompt: Have you ever eaten turnips before? What did you think? Consider taste, texture, and appearance and describe your snacking experience using three adjectives.