



Garlic

Garlic is one of the easiest veggies to grow, and has become a staple in American as well as ethnic cuisines. For these reasons, garlic has become an increasingly popular crop in the home garden.

At a Glance

Size: 1 to 3 feet tall

Sun: Full sun but will tolerate light shade

Soil: Deep, fertile, well-drained soil; the looser the composition of the soil, the larger the bulb

Water: Keep soil evenly moist

Fertilizer: Amend soil with compost and add bulb fertilizer at planting time

Where to plant: Garlic prefers full sun, but will tolerate light shade. If possible, select a planting site that is shaded in the hottest part of the day, as cooler soil results in larger heads.

When to plant: Garlic is best planted in the fall, during September or October in our area. Garlic can be planted in the spring, but the resulting heads are smaller.

How to Plant: Spade or roto-till garden and amend with compost. Compost will aide both heavy clay soil and sandy soil, and spading or roto-tilling will loosen the composition of the soil producing larger garlic heads. Work in a bulb fertilizer prior to planting. Choose the biggest and fattest

seed cloves and sow the clove root end down (blunt end down) 3 inches below the soil surface. Space about 6 inches apart. Water thoroughly and mulch if desired. Some top growth may be experienced when first planted, which is fine, as new leaves will appear in the spring.

How to Grow:

In early spring, when the daffodil leaves are a few inches out of the ground, remove the mulch and spread some compost on the bed. Replace the mulch.

Garlic heads grow bigger in cooler soil. Head growth starts when the soil temperature is around 60 degrees F and stops when the soil reaches 90 degrees F. A garden site that is shaded in the heat of the day results in cooler soil for a longer period of time. Mulching deeply with a light colored material such as straw insulates the soil from heat, suppresses weed growth and helps retain moisture. Moisture is important to the growth of garlic, so do not allow the soil to dry out. Keep the bed free of weeds as they compete with garlic for nutrients and water.

Hardneck garlic will form a scape, which is a curling, flowering stem. To produce a larger head, remove the scape before it becomes straight, and use it to flavor stir-fries or other dishes. They are delicious sautéed with fresh vegetables.



Harvesting and Storage:

Garlic is ready for harvesting mid-summer, usually late July or early August. When the garlic tops begin to yellow, stop watering. The bulbs are mature when the tops are a third to half brown or when it falls over. Use a garden fork to gently dig up the plant, being careful not to cut into the bulb. Hang the bulbs upside down in bundles of 5-10 plants in a dry, warm, dark, airy place for 3 to 4 weeks. Then cut the stalks about an inch above the bulb and store in open mesh bags in a cool, well-ventilated area.

Varieties:

There are two strains of modern garlic: hardneck and softneck. The most common hardneck garlic is rocambole. They produce large cloves, are easy to peel and have more flavor than softnecks. Because of their loose skins, they do not have a long shelf life, usually 4 to 5 months. Unlike common or softneck garlic, hardnecks throw up a flowering stem (scapes) that eventually turns woody. Remove the scape to encourage a larger bulb. The two common types of softneck garlic are artichoke and silverskin. Both strains are commonly sold in grocery stores. Artichokes are named for their similarity to artichokes: several overlapping layers (3 to 5) containing up to 20 cloves. Their color is white to off white and their thick wrappers explain why they are so hard to peel. The shelf life of the artichoke garlic is long, generally up to 8 months. Silverskins are high yielding, grow well in a variety of climates and are the most popular among garlic braiders.