

Garlic

A guide to planting and caring for a bold culinary favorite



At a Glance

Sun: Full sun, but will tolerate light shade.

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

Water: Keep soil evenly moist.

Fertilizer: Amend soil with compost and add higher nitrogen fertilizer at planting time.

Harvest: Mid-summer; late July, or early August

There are 2 strains of garlic: hardneck and softneck. Hardnecks grow a flowering stem that can be removed to encourage larger bulbs.

Garlic is one of the easiest veggies to grow, and has become a staple in cuisine, making it an increasingly popular crop in the home garden.

Where to Plant

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

When to Plant

Garlic is best planted in the fall, in September or October in this area. It can be planted in the spring, but the heads will be smaller.

How to Plant

Amend with compost to aid both heavy clay soil and sandy soil and produce larger garlic heads. Work in a higher nitrogen 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 (March to beginning of April) remove the mulch and spread some compost on the bed. Replace the mulch. Keep the bed free of weeds as they compete with garlic for nutrients and water.

Garlic heads grow bigger in cooler soil. Head growth starts when the soil temperature is around 60°F and stops when the soil reaches 90° 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.**

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 types 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 types are commonly sold in grocery stores. Artichokes are named for their similarity to artichokes, with 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.