

Growing Garlic in Containers

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Grow Garlic in Pots - Getting Started

To grow garlic in pots is a bit of a challenge, because it has a very long growing season and garlic needs regular watering. That said, it is well worth the work. You can grow hard-to-find varieties and the taste, as with almost any fresh-picked vegetable or herb, will make you an instant homegrown garlic addict. To top it off, if you grow hardneck garlic, you get to eat the scapes which are a delicacy that is just catching on in popularity.

However, if you live in a mild weather area, softneck garlic will grow best. The hardneck varieties grow best in cold weather climates.

What makes growing garlic in pots difficult is that you generally plant it in the fall and don't harvest until the middle of the summer. That's a long growing season, and keeping the garlic well watered over all that time can become tedious. To help with this problem, the bigger the pot you use, the more soil it will hold and therefore the more moisture it will retain.

If you live in a cold climate, make sure that you choose a garden pot can freeze and thaw without breaking. Smartpots are great for growing garlic, which are made of fabric and are perfect for winter conditions.

When to Grow Garlic

When to grow garlic depends on a number of factors, but generally, you want to plant it in the fall after the first frost, when the soil has cooled and before the ground freezes. In most places you can plant garlic anytime from September until November, though many people plant between Halloween and Thanksgiving.

How to Plant Garlic

First of all, here's what you need before you plant garlic.

- A large pot with good drainage
- High quality potting mix
- Garlic cloves that are fat, firm and healthy
- Slow release fertilizer
- Accessible water source

Once you've gathered all of the above, planting is easy.

- Fill your container with potting soil about three inches from the top of your pot. If your potting soil doesn't have it already, mix in a slow release fertilizer.
- Take your head of garlic and gently separate the cloves.
- Place the cloves, pointy end up in the soil. You'll want them at least 3 inches apart.
- Shovel soil onto cloves. If you live in a warmer climate, 3/4 to 1 inch of soil is fine. In colder areas cover with 2 inches of soil.
- Pat soil gently to firm it on top of garlic.

When to Harvest Garlic Scapes

Garlic scapes are the long, winding, almost blue green shoot that hardneck garlic varieties put out in the spring. Scapes have a fresh, mild garlic taste and make the best pesto I have ever had. They can also be used to glorify mashed potatoes, salads, roasted vegetables or stir-fries.

Harvest scapes when they are young and tender. Once they have curled around in a circle, they are ready for picking. Picking the scape not only is not only good for cooking, it will actually help your garlic grow bigger and better - up to 35%.

When to harvest garlic

When to harvest garlic is at best an inexact science. You want to harvest garlic when the bulbs are big and mature and before they start to split apart and rot. You will also want to cut back on watering a couple of weeks before you harvest your garlic. When the leaves begin to yellow, cut back on watering. The rule of thumb is to harvest your garlic when the bottoms of the leaves are beginning to turn yellow. You may have to dig a clove out to see if it is time to harvest. Don't pull garlic out by the stem; dig into the soil, being careful not to damage the bulb.

Gently shake and brush the dirt off the bulb. Leaving the leaves on, bundle your garlic loosely and hang or spread out garlic heads to cure. To cure your garlic in a well ventilated, warm area, out of the direct sun. It will take 2-4 weeks for the neck to get dry and the skin to become papery. You will know when it's dry enough because when you cut the tops off, the neck will be dry. Cut off the roots too.

Once cured, store in a cool dry place. Enjoy!