

Garlic

Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Garlic

Garlic is easy to grow and produces numerous bulbs after a long growing season. It is frost tolerant. Beyond its intense flavor and culinary uses, “the stinking rose” is good in the garden as an insect repellent and has been used for centuries as a home remedy.

Planting

- Garlic can be planted in the spring as soon as the ground can be worked, but fall planting is recommended for most gardeners. Plant in the fall and you’ll find that your bulbs are bigger and more flavorful when you harvest the next summer.
- In areas that get a hard frost, plant garlic 6 to 8 weeks before that frost. In southern areas, February or March is a better time to plant.
- Break apart cloves from bulb a few days before planting, but keep the papery husk on each individual clove.
- Plant cloves about one month before the ground freezes.
- Do not plant cloves from the grocery store. They may be unsuited varieties for your area, and most are treated to make their shelf life longer, making them harder to grow. Instead, get cloves from a mail order seed company or a local nursery.
- Ensure soil is well-drained with plenty of organic matter. Select a sunny spot.
- Place cloves 4 inches apart and 2 inches deep, in their upright position (the wide root side facing down and pointed end facing up).
- In the spring, as warmer temperatures come, shoots will emerge through the ground.

Care

- Northern gardeners should mulch heavily with straw for overwintering.
- Mulch should be removed in the spring after the threat of frost has passed. (Young shoots can’t survive in temps below 20°F on their own. Keep them under cover.)
- Cut off any flower shoots that emerge in spring. These may decrease bulb size.
- Weeds should not be a problem until the spring. Weed as needed.
- Garlic requires adequate levels of nitrogen. Fertilize accordingly, especially if you see yellowing leaves.
- Water every 3 to 5 days during bulbing (mid-May through June).
- A note on garlic scapes: Some folks love cooking the scapes (the tops of hardneck garlic). Whether you trim the scapes or let them keep growing is your preference. We like to stir fry scapes the way we cook green beans—similar with a spicy kick!

Pests/Diseases

Garlic has very few problems with pests in the garden (in fact, its a natural pest repellent!), and also very few problems with the diseases that plague other veggies. White Rot is one concern, but you should also keep an eye out for the same pests that plague onions.

- **White Rot** is a fungus that may attack garlic in cool weather. Not much can be done to control or prevent that problem except rotating your crops and cleaning up the area after harvesting. The spores can live in the soil for many years. The fungus affects the base of the leaves and roots.

Harvest/Storage

- Harvest time depends on when you plant, but the clue is to look for yellow tops. Harvest when the tops begin to yellow and fall over, before they are completely dry.
- In Northern climates, harvesting will probably be in late July or August. In Southern climates, it will depend on your planting date.
- Check the bulb size and wrapper quality; you don’t want the wrapper to disintegrate. Dig too early and the bulb will be immature. Discontinue watering.

- To harvest, carefully lift the bulbs with a spade or garden fork. Pull the plants, carefully brush off the soil, and let them cure in an airy, shady spot for two weeks. We hang them upside down on a string in bunches of 4 to 6. Make sure all sides get good air circulation.
- The bulbs are cured and ready to store when the wrappers are dry and papery and the roots are dry. The root crown should be hard, and the cloves can be cracked apart easily.
- Once the garlic bulbs are dry, you can store them. Remove any dirt and trim off any roots or leaves. Keep the wrappers on—but remove the dirtiest wrappers.
- Garlic bulbs may be stored individually with the tops removed, or the dried tops may be braided together to make a garlic braid to hang in the kitchen or storage room.
- Bulbs should be stored in a cool (40 degrees F), dark, dry place, and can be kept in the same way for several months. Don't store in your basement if it's moist!
- The flavor will increase as the bulbs are dried.
- If you plan on planting garlic again next season, save some of your largest, best-formed bulbs to plant again in the fall.

Recommended Varieties

There are three types of varieties of garlic: Softneck, Stiffneck, and Great-headed (Elephant). Most types are about 90 days to harvest.

- **Softneck** varieties, like their name suggests, have necks that stay soft after harvest, and therefore are the types that you see braided. Especially recommended for those in warmer climates, as it is less winter-hardy than other types. Strong, intense flavor. Recommended varieties: 'Persian Star', 'Mother of Pearl'
- **Stiffneck** varieties grow one ring of cloves around a stem, there is not a layer of cloves as there are in softneck varieties. They are extremely cold hardy, but do not store as well or long as other varieties. Flavor is more mild than softnecks. Recommended Variety: 'Carpathian'
- **Great-headed** varieties are not recommended. They are less hardy, and more closely related to leeks than other varieties. Their flavor is more like onion than traditional garlic. Bulbs and cloves are large, with about 4 cloves to a bulb.

Wit & Wisdom

A nickel will get you on the subway, but garlic will get you a seat.

–Yiddish proverb

Planting Garlic in the Fall

Robin Sweetser

Fall is traditionally the time to plant garlic in many regions. Just like onions and other plants in the allium family, garlic is sensitive to daylength and matures during the longest days of summer. Fall planting gives it a jump start on the growing season and it will be one of the first things to come up in the garden next spring.

Garlic is extremely easy to grow but good soil preparation is necessary if you want to produce the best and biggest bulbs. They need deeply cultivated, well-drained, rich soil with a pH of 6.4-6.8. Add 2-3 inches of compost and well-rotted manure to the bed before planting. Use quality seed garlic and plant several different varieties just in case one does poorly. Separate the cloves no more than 48 hours before planting to keep them from drying out. The largest cloves will produce the biggest bulbs. Plant individual cloves, peels intact, pointy end up, 2 inches deep and 6 inches apart. Mulch 5-8 inches deep with seedless straw. It will pack down over the winter to about 2 inches by spring and help to keep the weeds down during the growing season. Your garlic will form roots but little or no top growth before the ground freezes solid.



Early next spring it will be ready to grow, sending up tiny green shoots as soon as the ground thaws.

Not too many pests bother garlic but don't plant it where you have had trouble with wireworms or nematodes. Disease is more of an issue in poorly drained soils. Feed the plants every other week with a liquid fish emulsion fertilizer from the time shoots emerge in early spring until June 1. Water is critical during the bulb forming stage in early summer so try for an inch a week, including rainfall. If you are growing hard neck garlic - the best type for the northeast - around the time of summer solstice your garlic will send up a seed stalk called a scape. This should be cut off to encourage the

plants to put all their energy into bulb formation.



These stalks curl into a loop and are delicious. Chop them and add to salad, stir fry, soup, scrambled eggs, or any dish you want to enhance with a little garlic flavor. Buzzed in the blender with a little olive oil and parmesan cheese, they make especially good pesto. Leave one or two flower stalks standing to help you decide when to harvest your garlic. About four weeks prior to harvest the outer wrappers on the garlic bulbs start to dry so stop watering in July. Too much water at that stage can stain the wrapper or even cause mold.

Harvest your garlic around the end of July or early August, when the lower third to half of the leaves have turned brown and wilted but the upper leaves are still green. It can be tricky

deciding exactly when to harvest so that is where the flower stalks can come in handy. If the leaves are starting to turn brown and the scapes uncurl and stand up straight it is time to harvest. Hang bunches of newly harvested garlic to dry in a cool, well ventilated, shady spot for 3-4 weeks to cure. After the leaves, roots, and outer wrappers are completely dry, brush off any loose soil, trim the roots to 1/4 inch, and cut the tops back to an inch or two above the bulb before storing. Under optimum conditions of near freezing temps and 65-70% humidity, hardneck garlic will keep for five months and softneck for 8 months.

Save your biggest cloves to replant for next year. Old timers say that garlic "learns" because it adapts to your growing conditions and improves each year. Grab life by the bulbs and plant some garlic this fall!

~ By **Robin Sweetser**