
Growing Garlic

Types of Garlic:

Soft neck garlic (*Artichoke, Silverskin, etc.*) is the kind you generally find at the grocery store, and usually comes from the West Coast or China. It stores well and the stems can be braided. Soft neck garlic is not as productive, disease-resistant or winter hardy as hard neck garlic. *Hard neck garlic* has a stiff central stem that is surrounded by an outer ring of cloves. There are several distinct types and each has its own flavor (*Purple striped, Porcelain, Rocambole, etc.*).

When to Plant:

Plant garlic in the fall 4-6 weeks before the ground freezes (mid-September to mid-October) to allow root development for a good summer harvest. Just remember that the space where you plant garlic won't be available for another type of crop until late next summer so mark your planting spot!

How to Plant:

Choose a sunny spot and prepare the planting area down to a depth of about 8" by adding compost and balanced organic fertilizer. Garlic likes well-drained, slightly acidic soil. Separate cloves and plant each clove about 2" deep, pointy end up and about 5" apart. Plant the biggest cloves for the biggest heads, discarding any pitted or bluish color cloves. Keep area weeded and evenly moist.

Caring for your Garlic Plant: During winter, you may need to cover your garlic with about 6" of straw once the ground has frozen. In early spring, the plants will start sending up their onion-like leaves. You can leave behind a thin layer of mulch to suppress weeds since garlic grows very close to the soil surface and doesn't like the competition. Pull away mulch if too rainy to allow soil to dry and warm up.

Fertilize again in late spring with a balanced organic fertilizer. Clip off the flowers from your garlic when they sprout ~ they're edible, too! The flowers will use up the energy that can be used to produce large bulbs. When the tops begin to dry and fall over around July or August, stop watering.

When to Harvest:

The best thing to do is pull up a plant and look for well-developed cloves and three or fewer outer "skins" or covering layers over the bulb. If you harvest too early the cloves will be very small, too late and the bulb will have split. The tighter the head, the longer your garlic will store.

Lift the whole plant gently with a garden fork, brush off the dirt and store in a cool, dry place out of the sun for a couple of weeks. Then cut off the leaves and most of the stem, about 1" above the head. Do not wash! Store your garlic in a cool, dry, dark place around 50° F.

Save your largest bulbs for planting in late fall and start all over again!