
Garlic

Garlic, a hardy perennial, is a member of the onion family and has been used as a culinary and medicinal herb since the time of the Egyptian pharaohs. Garlic has flat leaves rather than the round hollow leaves of the onion and produces many small bulbs (cloves) rather than one large bulb. Garlic is an excellent crop to plant in September or October.

Most varieties of garlic can be divided into two general categories: those that send up a seed stalk (hardneck varieties) and those that don't (softneck varieties). Softneck varieties will sometimes send up a seedstalk if stressed for water. Hardneck types include varieties best suited to cooler climates and are larger and easier to peel. Softneck types have been cultivated over a longer time period, are suited to a variety of climates, and hold up better in storage due to their tighter skins.

Try a couple of different varieties each year until you find those which best suit your taste and gardening style. For hardneck varieties try Rocambole, Continental, Spanish Roja, Carpathian, or German Red. These all produce large, easy to peel cloves and tend to be on the hot and spicy side. Some good softneck varieties are Inchelium Red, California Early, Artichoke, Chet's Italian, Mild French, and Silverskin. These are milder, produce smaller cloves, and are most desirable for braiding.

Garlic grows best in a rich, deep, sandy loam to clay loam soil with a pH between 6.0 and 8.0. Adequate levels of nitrogen and phosphorus are critical for good production. Add 1/4 to 1/3 of a pound of actual nitrogen (about three pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer) per 100 square feet. If using compost, you will need to estimate the amount of compost that will provide this amount of nitrogen (3 to 4 inches of well-rotted compost incorporated into the planting area). Additional applications of nitrogen can also be made in spring. This can be done with a light application of N-containing fertilizer, rich compost, or manure.

Adequate phosphorus fertilizer placed in the root zone assures availability. Soil testing will indicate available phosphorus. Phosphorus is best when placed in the root zone. Do this by amending the soil with compost, then digging away a layer of amended soil and placing the desired quantity of phosphorus fertilizer about 4 to 6 inches below the seedbed or transplant. Add 1/5 to 1/4 lb of actual phosphate (P₂O₅) per 100 square ft of garden space. A liberal application of bone meal could be banded to ensure adequate supplies.

When planting, select clean, dry bulbs, break them into individual cloves and plant the same day as divided. Try to maintain the integrity of the outer skin. Plant cloves 3 to 4 inches deep and 6 inches apart. Rows should be 12 to 18 inches apart. Irrigate immediately after planting. Garlic cloves require 4 to 6 weeks of cool weather (less than 40 degrees F) after planting to vernalize the plant to induce bulb production. During fall and winter, the bulb will produce roots and some top growth.

After the weather warms up in spring, long, strap-like leaves will emerge and lengthen. Keep plants well watered through spring and early summer. Top-setting garlic will produce seed stalks in late spring. These should be broken over (or removed) to encourage larger bulb formation. In June to early July, leaves will yellow and the tops will begin to fall. Irrigation should be stopped at this time to prevent rotting. Harvest gently and allow to dry in a shady location. The garlic can be cleaned, then braided or simply trimmed and stored for later use.

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Adapted from original Backyard Gardener publications by Jeff Schalau, Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Yavapai County

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