

Planting and Growing Garlic

Garlic is a favorite garden plant because it is so common in the culinary world. The flavor of fresh, home grown garlic surpasses anything from the grocery store.

Garlic is a long-season crop. It is planted in the fall, because it needs a cold period to produce bulbs, and is harvested in the summer.

Garlic bulbs are available in garden centers, through catalogues and online. It is best to order early in June, as garlic suppliers may run low in garlic planting season.

Types of Garlic

Hardneck garlic has better flavor and produces a hard stalk called a scape. Suggested varieties: Spanish Roja, Carpathian, Music, Georgian Crystal, Metechi, Persian Star, German Extra Hardy.

Softneck garlic has braidable stems and stores better than hardneck, but is less cold hardy so hardneck is preferred to grow in Illinois. This is the variety you find in grocery stores. Suggested varieties: Inchelium Red, Early Red Italian, Idaho silver, and Nootka rose.

In my home garden, garlic is one of our most successful crops. Gardeners can select the biggest bulbs from the previous summer's harvest and develop their own variety, adapted to their local climate.

RYAN PANKAU, EXTENSION EDUCATOR, HORTICULTURE



Plant garlic cloves with the growing point (the narrow tip) pointed up and the basal plate directed down.

Planting FAQs

When should you plant garlic?

Fall is the best time to plant garlic, 4 -6 weeks before the ground freezes. This allows the clove to grow roots before it goes dormant for the winter.

Can you plant in spring?

Early spring planting is possible, but cloves must first be refrigerated for about 8 weeks to meet the chilling requirements needed to produce bulbs.

Does garlic have seeds?

Each garlic bulb contains several cloves and each clove is planted individually. Separate cloves from the bulb right before planting. Do not peel the cloves' papery skins.

How deep should cloves be planted?

Plant cloves 1-2 inches deep, 4-5 inches apart, in rows 15-18 inches apart. The growing point's narrow tip should face up.

What kind of site does garlic need to grow well?

Plant in full sun into well-drained soil amended with compost. Mulch with straw to prevent frost heaving. Keep evenly moist.

Does garlic need fertilizer?

If soil is not amended with compost, apply 3 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 foot rows. Ten-foot rows would require 0.3 lbs (4.8 oz) per row.

What if I plant in stands instead of rows?

If a stand of garlic is desired instead of rows, gardeners can plant bulbs 5 inches apart in all directions. If a harvest of green garlic is desired in the early spring, plant cloves closer together.

Spring Care and Harvest

In spring, growth resumes. The flowers, known as scapes, form and should be harvested to facilitate large bulb growth later in the summer.

Scapes: Don't throw away harvested scapes. Instead, use them to make pesto, or to add to salads and dishes calling for a mild garlic flavor.

Green garlic: If you spaced your cloves closer together, harvest "green garlic" in the spring to make room for 5-inch plant spacing. Green garlic is similar to an onion with a mild hint of garlic.



Remove flowering scapes in the spring to ensure a harvest of larger garlic bulbs.

Summer Harvest

When to harvest

Once garlic starts to die back and half of the leaves have turned yellow, it is time to harvest. In Illinois, this usually occurs June to July depending on the zone. Do not wait too long. The bulb could rot.

Pro Tip: When the plant has five green leaves, the garlic is ready to be harvested.

How to harvest

Dig up garlic bulbs with a potato fork and shake off any excess soil. Do not over-clean bulbs to avoid damaging them.

All garlic varieties taste similar at harvest time, but after curing and a few weeks of storage, individual variety flavors will come out.

KELLY ALLSUP, EXTENSION EDUCATOR, HORTICULTURE



Straw mulch helps keep bulbs from frost heaving, helps prevent weeds and conserves moisture.

Curing garlic

Garlic bulbs can be eaten fresh or be cured for storage.

- Curing takes between 4-6 weeks.
- Cure in a well-ventilated structure out of the sun.
- Leave stems and leaves attached to the bulb.
- Trim stems and roots and remove excess dirt after curing.

I use a wire mesh screen to cure garlic and then store them in a netted bag in the basement.

CHRIS ENROTH, EXTENSION EDUCATOR, HORTICULTURE

Storing Garlic

- Store garlic bulbs in a cool dry place.
- Garlic can be kept for several months in mesh or paper bags in a ventilated area with cool temperatures, such as barns or basements.
- Leave the largest cloves for re-planting in the fall.

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MORE INFORMATION / REFERENCES

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