

Growing Garlic



Early fall is the perfect time to plant garlic, which requires a long growing season to develop large bulbs. Each clove you plant now will yield one head next summer. There are two main types of garlic: hardneck and softneck. Hardneck garlic has a single ring of 5-10 cloves surrounding a stiff flowering stalk, called a scape, which is topped with bulbils. Softneck garlic consists of 6-18 smaller cloves arranged in overlapping layers, and rarely produces a flowering stalk. Hardnecks are more tolerant of cold weather than softnecks, but softnecks generally have a longer storage life.

For your first planting, purchase cloves from a local source, such as Farmer D Organics, or from a mail-order catalog, such as [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#), [Sow True Seed](#), or [Botanical Interests](#). Do not use garlic purchased from a grocery store as these are often treated to prevent sprouting. For subsequent plantings, you can use some of your harvest for the next year's crop. You can plant the larger cloves - as they will produce the larger heads - and eat the smaller ones.

Garlic grows best in full sun with loose, crumbly soil. To plant, follow the steps in the table at right. Keep the cloves watered for about three weeks after planting. In spring, when the days get longer, garlic will begin to bulb. Keep the soil evenly moist to encourage bulb growth. Spray the foliage with diluted liquid fish emulsion in early spring. Additional fertilizing after May is not necessary.

When flower buds appear, snip off the stalk to promote larger bulbs. When the leaves begin to yellow in summer, cut back on watering to prevent rot.

It's time to harvest garlic when about half of the leaves have turned yellow and fall over or when only three or four green leaves remain on the plant. Do not wait for all the leaves to turn yellow.

It's best to harvest garlic in the morning. Harvested bulbs must be cured (dried) thoroughly before storing or they will rot. Carefully brush away soil, spread the plants on a screen for good air circulation, and cure in a shaded spot for 2 to 3 weeks. Curing is complete when the skins are dry and the necks are tight. At this point, you can braid the stems or cut them off, and store the bulbs in a mesh bag in a cool, dry place. Hardnecks will keep for 6-10 months while softnecks can last up to a year.

- Susan

How to Plant Garlic

- Step 1** Break a garlic bulb apart into individual cloves, being careful to keep the papery skins covering each clove intact. Then fill a quart jar with water and mix in 1 tablespoon of baking soda and 1 tablespoon of liquid seaweed. Soak the cloves in this mixture for 2 hours prior to planting to prevent fungal disease and encourage vigorous growth.
- Step 2** In the meantime, prepare your bed for planting. Garlic grows best in rich, well-drained soil that is free of weeds. Dig a furrow about 3 inches deep. Place the presoaked cloves into the furrow, spacing them 6 to 8 inches apart. Be sure the flat root end is down and the pointy end is up.
- Step 3** Cover the cloves with 2 inches of soil and side-dress the furrow with compost or scratch in granulated organic fertilizer. Water the bed in well and cover it with 6 to 8 inches of straw mulch. You should see shoots poking through the mulch in 4 to 6 weeks. The garlic stops growing in the winter months and resumes in spring.

Excerpted from *Organic Gardening*
www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/how-to-plant-garlic