



## **GROWING GARLIC**

Garlic is a staple in kitchens, and of cuisines all the world over. Long used both for its medicinal value and its ability to wake up any tired dish, garlic has been raised and traded by indigenous people for all 6000 years of life on this spaceship that we call earth. Garlic, like the rest of the members of the Allium family (leeks, onions, and shallots), can grow in a wide range of soil conditions, but are at their happiest when they are planted into a soil that is richly composted and fertilized, well-drained, kept moist, and cultivated to keep out any competition from other plants such as weeds and grasses.

Garlic grows a shallow root system, so be careful when digging around the plants. A prepared garden bed that is in a full sun location is ideal. Garlic can be planted here on the south coast from mid-September through early March. When you are getting ready to plant, break the bulb into its individual cloves, and set aside the largest for your garden while using the smallest in your kitchen for cooking purposes. When planting, use the larger cloves, this will both yield the largest possible bulbs at harvest time and maximize your garden space. Plant the cloves root side down with the tops of the cloves being 1" deep. Gently cover the cloves with soil and then top with 1-2" of rich compost, animal manure, or mulch. This topper will keep the soil evenly moist, suppress a lot of weed growth, and gradually feed the developing bulbs during their growing season. While the plants are growing, keep the soil moist, as you would for any leafy green like lettuce or spinach, and do not hesitate to throw a new layer of compost on top of, and around, the growing bulbs. Hard neck varieties grow a tall, woody, flowering stalk that usually produces little bulblets at its top. If the plant is allowed to put its energy into these seeds, the bulb that is developing in the ground will end up being smaller, so we recommend cutting off the flower spike when it is around 9" tall.

When harvesting garlic, it is important to pay attention, because there is a definite window in which you will have the best results. If dug too soon, the new bulbs will not have had time to form their protective skins, and as a result will bruise easily and not store well. Observing your plants and watching the changes that they are going through will help you make an informed decision on when to harvest. As the bulbs mature, the leaves will begin to brown and die back. When there are still 5-6 green leaves remaining on the plant, we dig up a trial bulb and check it out. What we look for is to see that the bulb has developed to a nice size and has a suitable buildup of protective papery wrappers around it. If left in the ground for too long, hard neck varieties will begin to separate and grow new plants. If you have decided that it is time to harvest, dig the plants up carefully. We recommend using a digging fork to gently break the soil apart. Then lift the garlics out of the ground while being careful not to tug too hard and break the stalks off of the bulbs. Next, brush off the soil from around the roots and bulb and its root, still being careful not to bruise the garlics, as this will greatly shorten their storage time.

Drying is the essential part of curing the bulbs, so do not use water to wash them off. Immediately move the newly harvested and cleaned garlic out of direct sunlight. There are different ways to cure your garlic, but the most important consideration is air circulation. You will want the curing bulbs to be drying

evenly in a dark, cool place. Some growers tie 6-10 garlic plants together and hang them up. Others will spread out the plants to be cured on screens, drying racks or slatted shelves. Garlic stores longer if it is cured with its leaves or stalks attached. The plants should be left to cure from 3 weeks to 2 months, depending on the humidity and air circulation. After thoroughly drying your garlic, trim off the roots and cut the stalks 1 1/2" above the bulb, after which you can store them in a net bag or an old onion sack. If you have chosen to cure your garlic in bunches, you can hang them in a pantry or other convenient, cool location and use as needed. Soft neck varieties can be braided and hung.

There are two distinct sub-species into which all modern garlic fall, these are Hard-neck varieties which produce a flower stalk and Soft-neck varieties which usually do not. These two sub-species can be then broken down into the five main groups of garlic: Rocambole, Standard Purple Stripe, Porcelain, Artichoke, and Silverskin.

**ROCAMBOLE (hardneck)**-These are the most popular and widely grown of the hardneck garlics. Rocamboles produce large cloves that have a deep, full-bodied flavor and are easy to peel, which makes them a favorite of chefs. However, due to their loose skins, these have a shorter storage life than most other varieties. Longer storage is possible if the bulbs are well grown and well cured before storage. Rocambole cloves are usually rounded and blunt at the tip. Most strains average 6-11 cloves in a single circle around the stem. One pound of seed garlic will yield about 60 plants.(This varies widely) Clove colors range from brown to tan.

**STANDARD PURPLE STRIPE (hardneck)**- A variety named because of the bright purple streaks and blotches on both the bulb wrappers and the clove skins. These are regarded as the most attractive garlics and usually win "Best Baked Garlic" awards at fairs and cook-offs. Most strains have 8-12 cloves per bulb, are longer and are crescent shaped. This variety will store slightly longer than rocambole. One pound of seed garlic will produce approximately 60 plants. This is an attractive ornamental garden plant.

**PORCELAIN (hardneck)**- This is a variety that has been coming into its own lately. In the past few years gardeners and gourmets alike have been turning others onto this large, easy to peel, long storing, flavorful garlic variety.

**ARTICHOKE (softneck)**- This is a very vigorous and large-bulbed garlic variety. The plants are shorter than hardneck varieties and have a wider growth habit. Artichokes are named for their pattern of overlapping cloves, reminiscent of the true artichoke. Many Artichoke strains have 3-5 clove layers, containing 12-20 total cloves. Outer cloves are fat and round, but irregular in shape, often with three flat sides and a paper tail at the tip. Many Artichokes have a mild flavor, which makes them attractive to those who eat their garlic raw, for health reasons. Clove skins adhere tightly to the garlic, one reason for their long storage life. One pound will yield approximately 80 plants.

**SILVERSKIN (softneck)**- This is the variety that is most often found on the shelf at the market due to its very long storage life. They are also the highest yielding variety and do well in a wide range of climates. Bulb wrappers are fine and smooth, usually all white. Three clove layers are common, total cloves per bulb will vary from 12-20. One pound of seed will yield approximately 90 plants. Outer cloves are usually flat and wide, while inner cloves are tall, narrow and concave. Silverskins have long been the favorite of braiders because of their smooth shiny skin and symmetrical shape. These are the last garlics harvested and may lodge (fall over) a week or more before harvest due to their weak necks.

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