

# Garlic Growing & Harvesting

Garlic grown in your own garden and properly stored has a fresh pungency quite unlike the musty odor and bitter flavor too often present in cloves that have been sitting on a grocery shelf. Fortunately for those who enjoy cooking with it, this bulbous herb is easy to grow and requires very little space in the garden.

The secret to a harvest of large garlic bulbs is fall planting - generally four to six weeks before the soil freezes, or as late as the beginning of December in mild winter regions. This way the roots can become established before winter sets in and will be ready to support vigorous leafy growth come early spring. It also makes for larger plants and therefore larger bulbs. The plants will begin to produce bulbs once the long days of June arrive.



## PREPARE THE PLANTING BED

It's wise to plant garlic in a spot not recently used for garlic or other plants in the onion family. As is the case with most vegetables, rotating crops prevents the buildup of disease organisms in the soil. Garlic requires a reasonably fertile well-drained soil. Avoid planting in areas where water can collect around roots, causing them to rot or become diseased. Planting in a raised bed lined with chicken wire will also exclude gophers, which are fond of garlic. Work several inches of compost and a complete fertilizer such as **EB Stone Organic All Purpose 5-5-5**. Then smooth soil with a rake.

## PLANT & MULCH

Garlic reproduces vegetatively which means it grows from individual cloves broken off from a whole bulb. Each clove multiplies in the ground, forming a new bulb that consists of 10 to 20 cloves. Break a bulb apart into individual cloves, keeping only the largest, firmest ones for planting. Space the cloves 4-6" apart and allow about a foot between rows. Be sure to set the cloves in with the pointed end up and the flat basal plate down. Push each one an inch or so into the ground, firm the soil around it, and water the bed if it is dry.

After planting, lay down a protective mulch of chopped leaves, straw or grass clippings to slow the growth of winter weeds. Don't worry if a few garlic leaves sprout; most of the plants above ground growth will occur in spring.

## SPRING CARE

When the leaves begin to grow in earnest, it's important to feed the plants again to encourage robust growth. Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer that decomposes slowly, such as **blood meal** or **Osmocote**, gently working a teaspoon or two into the soil near each plant.

If the mulch has decomposed, apply another layer to reduce weeds and help retain moisture. Pull any weeds or they will rob moisture and nutrients from the garlic. Be sure to keep the garlic patch watered during dry spells.



# Garlic Growing & Harvesting (cont'd)

In late spring some varieties send up flower stalks that will eventually produce small bulbils. Cut these stalks off (you can add them to salads and vegetable dishes if you wish) to help direct the plant's energy into forming a large bulb.

As the summer solstice approaches, garlic plants stop producing new leaves and begin to form bulbs. Remove any remaining mulch and stop watering. Allowing the soil to dry out around the maturing bulbs will help the garlic store better.

## HARVEST & STORAGE

When most of the leaves have turned brown (in mid-July to early August) gently pull or dig up the bulbs being careful not to bruise them. Don't leave them in the ground too long, or they may begin to separate and will not store well.

Lay the plants, leaves and all, out to dry for two to three weeks in a shady spot with good air circulation. An old window screen on sawhorses under a tree works well. Be sure to bring the plants inside if it rains.

When the roots feel dry and brittle, rub them off along with any loose dirt. Don't wash the bulbs or break them apart or they won't last as long. Either braid the garlic, tie it in bunches or cut off the stems a few inches above the bulb. Hang the braids or store the loose bulbs on slatted shelves or screens in an airy, cool (but not freezing) location.

Set aside the largest bulbs to replant later in the fall. During the winter check your harvest often, and promptly use any bulbs that show signs of sprouting.

