

Garlic

Two types of garlic are usually grown in home gardens, soft neck types and hard neck (top-setting) types. You typically find soft neck garlic in grocery stores. Compared to hard neck garlic, it has small cloves but a longer storage life. Hard neck cultivars produce an attractive scape (flower stem) that is pinched out to increase bulb size. The scapes are used as scallions. Purchase certified, disease-free garlic bulbs for planting from reputable seed sources. Never plant garlic from a grocery store. It may be a symptomless disease carrier. Elephant garlic is actually a form of leek that forms large cloves resembling garlic.

Planting:

Plant individual cloves between Oct. 1 and Nov. 1 so they have time to grow roots and a few leaves before cold weather sets in. Plant 1 to 2 inches deep, similar to onion sets, in soil amended with organic matter. Large cloves produce larger bulbs than small cloves. Spring plantings produce smaller bulbs because size is related to the number of leaves initiated prior to bulbing. Space cloves 4 to 6 inches apart in the row. You can improve efficiency by planting double or triple wide rows.

Cultivation:

- **Fertilizing** – When spring growth begins, fertilize with a high nitrogen fertilizer such as cottonseed meal. Apply every two weeks until bulbing begins.
- **Watering** – As harvest approaches, watering should be less frequent to avoid disease problems.
- **Weeding** – Cultivate very carefully so the shallow root system is not disturbed. Remove

all young weed seedlings by hand or with a hoe and use a mulch laid along each side of the row to keep weed seeds from germinating.

- **Special Directions** – Garlic likes rich, well drained soil and will not do well in dense soils.

Harvesting:

Plant tops begin to die back in late June to early July. The harvest date for Central MD is around July 1. Gently lift the plants with a garden fork when about ½ of the foliage turns brown but do not knock the tops over prematurely. The bulbs should be full-sized and well-wrapped. Allow plants to dry in a well-ventilated location out of direct sun (e.g. on top of window screens propped up on bricks). Cut off the tops after 7-14 days of drying. Some gardeners simply cut off the tops and trim the roots at harvest and then dry the bulbs as described above.

Storage and Preservation: Cool (32°- 38°F), dry (65% - 70% RH) conditions; 6 to 9 months. Home-grown garlic will usually last through December if stored in a kitchen pantry or basement. To avoid botulism poisoning, do not store fresh garlic in oil unless it is kept in the freezer.

Nutrition: Garlic contains trace minerals and phytonutrients with antimicrobial properties.

Preparation & Use:

Choose firm heads that haven't sprouted. Garlic is usually used to season other foods, but can be roasted and mashed into a paste to spread on bread.

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