

How to Grow Garlic

WHEN TO PLANT: For our Bay Area mild winters, plant garlic October through January.

SOIL PREPARATION: Garlic needs fertile soil with lots of organic matter so the soil remains uncompacted through the long growing season. Gardeners with clay soils need to add more organic material than those blessed with lighter, sandier soil. Sloat Garden Center suggests Loam Builder or Forest Mulch Plus. Apply *prior* to planting.

HOW TO PLANT: Break the bulbs into individual cloves. Small cloves usually produce small bulbs so if space is limited, plant only the larger ones. Plant cloves 1 inch deep, point up and flatter root side down. Minimum spacing is 4" apart, 8" between rows. To grow larger bulbs, space 6" apart and 12" between rows.

GROWING: If garlic overwinters, it must be kept well weeded. Avoid damaging the shallow roots when cultivating. Garlic needs to be moderately fertilized as soon as it begins growing in the spring. Side dress/mulch with chicken manure or Loam Builder. Garlic also enjoys high nitrogen foliar feeding applied every 10 to 14 days. Maxsea 16-16-16 is excellent for this. Once bulbing begins (around June), fertilizing is useless and may even hinder getting the best quality bulbs. While the plant is rapidly growing, keep the soil moist as you would for leafy greens such as lettuce or spinach.

HARVEST: Gauging the right time to harvest is important. Dug too soon, the skins will not have formed around each clove. Each year the timing is a little different, so rather than watch the calendar, observe the plants. As the bulbs mature, the leaves brown off. When there are still 5 to 6 green leaves remaining on the plant, dig and examine a plant every few days to check the bulb. (Incidentally, immature bulbs that haven't fully developed skins around their cloves can be chopped up and used like onions.)

In very good garlic ground (very fluffy soil) the plants can be pulled by hand, but it is usually better to loosen the soil first with a digging fork. Immediately, *and very gently*, brush off the soil from around the roots. Drying is the essential part of curing the bulbs, so don't wash them in water. Move the newly dug garlic out of direct sunlight.

CURING: Some gardener's tie the plants by their leaves or stalks in loose bundles of 8 to 12 plants and hang them under cover. Others spread the plants in single layers on screen, drying racks, or slatted shelves. Garlic stores longer if it is cured with its stalk and leaves attached. Good air circulation is absolutely essential.

Bulbs should cure from 3 weeks to 2 months, depending on humidity and amount of air circulation. After curing, you may trim the roots. If keeping your garlic in sacks, cut the stalks off ½ inch above the bulb and gently clean them with a soft bristle brush, taking care not to strip off the papery skin.

STORING: Hang bulbs in netted sacks or pantyhose with good air circulation on all sides. You can also simply hang the dried bunches or make and hang braids of the soft-neck varieties. Perfect storage conditions are 45-55 degrees F. at 50% relative humidity. (Storage below 40 degrees F. actually makes garlic sprout.)

Thanks go to Irish Eyes, Inc. for providing this information



We'll help you grow the plants you love!

www.sloatgardens.com