

GARLIC

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

Overview

Garlic, *Allium sativum*, is a cool season vegetable of the onion family and is related to onions, shallots, and leeks. Garlic was a staple in the diets of Egyptian slaves because it was believed to give them added strength as they built the pyramids. Garlic has been used for flavoring European and Chinese dishes as well as for medicinal purposes. It is an adaptable plant that will take on a certain size, shape, flavor, and color after a few years of growth in a garden becoming accustomed to the specific garden climate.

Choosing Varieties

There are three different types of garlic to choose from. Softneck garlic, which is typically the kind sold in grocery stores, doesn't usually send up a seed stalk and is somewhat less hardy than the hardneck kind. Hardneck garlic has a single ring of cloves around a stiff flower stalk and is suited for cooler climates. Elephant garlic is not actually garlic but a type of leek. It produces a few large cloves that have a milder flavor than true garlic. A few available varieties are:

Softneck Garlic

- New York White (hardier than West Coast garlic)
- Red Toch (white clove w/ pink streaks, heirloom)

Hardneck Garlic

- German Extra Hardy (vigorous, 4-5 large cloves)
- German Porcelain (purple stripes, keeps well)
- Romanian Red (sharp taste, keeps well)

When a hardneck garlic plant sends up a flower stalk called a scape, it should be cut off, so the plant will focus its energy into growing a larger bulb. Scares, if cut off when curly, are edible and can be used in salads or stir fries.

Planting garlic from the grocery store is not advised because it typically is a variety not adapted to the Midwest. It is recommended to try a few varieties to determine overall plant performance and personal preference.

Planting Tips

In Missouri, individual cloves can be planted in mid-October. They should be planted about 2 inches deep with the pointed end up. They should be spaced about 4 inches



apart in rows that are about 1 foot apart. Raised beds or rows may help with drainage.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Garlic cloves should be planted in well-drained soils and would benefit from the addition of nutrients either in the form of a complete fertilizer or aged compost. Soil should be loose and crumbly to allow the bulbs to form properly. Garlic cloves should receive enough water to keep them vigorously growing without waterlogging the soil.

Garlic is fairly resistant to pests. However, onion thrips have been known to attack garlic foliage and leave light-colored blotches on leaves. Insecticidal soaps can be used to control thrips (be sure to follow product labels).

To prevent diseases, be sure to rotate members of the onion family with other crops each year.

Harvesting

Garlic can be harvested when the bottom 2-3 leaves have turned yellow, usually mid-July. Bulbs should be cured by placing them on a screen (for air circulation) in a garage or other location out of the sun and sheltered from rain until the skins are dry and the necks are tight. Bulbs should not be washed or peeled before storing in a cool dry place for up to 8 months. The larger cloves can be used to plant a new crop in the fall.

Seed Sources

Cloves can be purchased from local garden centers. Cloves can also be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Johnny's Selected Seeds (1-877-564-6697, johnnyseeds.com) and Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (1-417-924-8917, rareseeds.com) are two companies that sell garlic varieties.

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