



16125 22 Mile Rd Macomb, MI 48044 586-247-5533 13790 W. Highland Rd. Hartland, MI 48353 248-714-5720



V#9

Growing Garlic

Prepare the soil

Ideally, a deep, fertile, very well drained soil is needed. Add -and incorporate well-a good dressing of a general garden fertilizer before or at the time of sowing. Your soils pH must be above 6.0.(Ideally, pH 6.5 -7.0). Unless you are on limestone country, most soils will benefit from a liming at least a month or so before planting. Lots of well rotted compost is beneficial, if you can get it.

When to sow

Warm temperate areas - generally speaking, it can be planted in autumn through to early winter. Under warm temperate climatic conditions autumn planted garlic will remain dormant for a few weeks, then develop roots and a shoot. With the onset of the cold of winter growth is fairly slow until temperatures warm in spring. The cold of winter is needed to initiate the side buds that will ultimately grow and swell to become cloves (and in some types, to initiate the flower bud). The lengthening days of spring are the signal for the initiated but undeveloped side buds to start forming into cloves. It is possible to sow in early spring and get a reasonably good harvest, but everything is against you - wet, difficult to work soil; no early root growth; less exposure to winter chill. Early Spring is possible, but definitely a second choice.

Temperate areas- plant after the first good frosts of autumn. Spring planting is possible in the higher latitudes, as the longer day lengths promote bulbing, but the shorter season means the bulbs are often smaller. Autumn garlic will produce roots, but either no, or short, top growth. If the garlic sprouts have emerged, they will survive freezes and snowfalls, but they should be mulched heavily (about 15 cm/6 inches) to prevent heaving. Pull the mulch aside in spring. Autumn planted garlic will have strong roots by winters icy grip, and these roots will help prevent the 'seed' being pushed out of the ground as the soil alternately freezes and thaws ('frost heave').

How to sow

Choose the biggest and fattest seed cloves, and sow them root end down, standing erect, and far enough in the soil that they are anything from just buried to being 25 mm/an inch or so under the soil surface. Put them about 100 mm/4 inches apart.

The tricks of growing satisfactory bulbs

Home grown garlic can be disappointing- small bulbs, bulbs with only one big soft clove, no bulb. The causes of unsatisfactory production come down to the quality of the 'seed', growing conditions, the variety, the vagaries of the season, and disease.

Give the best possible drainage

It is important to have a free draining soil. While cloves put in early in winter will have a longer cold treatment and will respond to

lengthening days more quickly than those put in later, there is always a risk of the cloves rotting in a cold wet soil. Especially if the cloves are of dubious quality, or if you have a history of disease problems in your own saved seed cloves. Commercially, the seed cloves are often soaked in rugged fungicides prior to sowing to minimize this problem, but this is not an option for most of us. Excellent drainage is very important to give the edge on climate and disease.

Give your plants an unreasonable advantage

Your garlic is likely in a race against root rotting disease and stem and leaf diseases. The better the leaf growth before bulbing starts, the bigger the bulb and the cloves will be. This translates to 'early care pays dividends later'. And also at the main growing stage, give your garlic every advantage to grow more than the disease will damage. Provide a free draining soil by amending it with sand, potting mix, well finished compost, leaf mould, or whatever. Consider a raised bed, or large tub culture. Before sowing, beef up the nutrient status of your soil by working in a complete fertilizer (5N - 10P - 10K) at about 225gms/half a pound per 7.5 Metres/25 feet of 30 cm/12 inch wide row. Once they have started growth in spring, give them regular - say fortnightly - very light side dressings of urea (or other high nitrogen fertilizer), spread 100 mm/6 inches either side of the plants. Liquid manures are also beneficial. Garlic competes poorly with weeds. Keep them as close to meticulously weeded as is possible. Be careful with the hoe- there is nothing more tragic than a beautifully growing garlic plant sliced off at soil level by a hurried hoe! If the weather is dry, mulch them to conserve water. Dry soil when the leaves are developing affects the yield quite badly, so water them well and regularly in dry periods.

Harvesting

The plants are ready to harvest when the foliage has died off, or mostly died off. If it is very wet near harvest time, consider lifting them a bit earlier and drying them under cover. Left in wet soil, the outer parchment often rots. And if there is disease in the root plate, it may develop too far and cause the bulb to fall apart when it is lifted. Rocambole is almost always ready to harvest a month or so before common garlic. But the state of the foliage is *the* indicator, not any particular date. An experienced Italian American home garlic grower passes on a valuable tip for refining the estimate of when to harvest common garlic-

"Once the top part of the plant has begun to turn brown, pull one of them and peel back the sheaths one at a time. My grandfather liked to wait until there were 2 sheaths, but I'm more comfortable with 3 to 4 sheaths. The problem with *only* watching the top part of the plant is that when it's *very wet* or *very dry*, the sheaths can reduce much faster than in other years.

For example, it was very wet this year in Pittsburgh, PA, where I live and garden. The plants had just started to turn brown when I checked the first one. It was already down to 3 sheaths!!! You might want to warn people what happens if they wait too long - the garlic opens up and it's nearly impossible to get out of the ground. (And the garlic you do find is already starting its growth cycle, so it doesn't keep.)" - RC, Pennsylvania. USA

Wash the bulbs, especially the roots, and leave them for a week or so to dry- so long as it is fine. If you live in a hot climate area, you will have to dry them out of the sun, or your precious bulbs will sunburn. If the weather is dubious, dry your garlic under cover. When the bulbs are dry, you can trim off the roots, scuff off the outer discolored parchment, and braid your garlic for storage.

If you intend to keep your own clove seed, select the biggest and best bulb. Leave the cloves on the bulb, and at planting time select only the best cloves to use as seed cloves. But store your seed bulbs in a relatively cool, dry place-heat in storage can cause the seed cloves to develop into a plant that produces a single large clove, rather than a normal multi clove bulb. Prolonged very low temperatures can also disrupt proper growth.

Storage

Store garlic in a dry place- the kitchen is OK, and towards autumn (if there is still some left!) check for soft bulbs (rotting internally), and sign of insect damage. Throw out damaged bulbs. The ideal storage conditions are temperatures of around 10C/50F, dry, and well ventilated.