

GROWING AND STORING GARLIC

When to Plant: Late Sept through Mid-Oct. Garlic will sprout in the fall and uses this time to establish its root systems so it can survive the winter and be ready to start foliage growth in the spring.

How to Plant: Separate the bulbs into cloves, being careful not to bruise or damage them. Plant 4" to 6" apart in rows that are 1.5' to 2' apart. Soil should be fertile, well-drained soil. Add compost to the top couple of inches 2 weeks prior to planting to improve nutrients. Plant the cloves root end down 4-inches deep. Mulch with at least 6" of straw to protect the garlic from sub-zero temperatures. Pull the mulch to the side in spring when the snow melts and the days begin to warm. You will see the leaves start to poke out of the soil.

Care: Fertilize garlic in the early spring with a fertilizer high in nitrogen like blood meal, to promote foliage growth. During the growing season, monitor garlic for proper moisture. One way to determine moisture content is to stick your finger down into the root zone and feel the soil. If your finger come out dry, it's time to water; if it's muddy and sticks to your finger, it's too wet. If it stays wet for too long, pull back the mulch and let the ground dry out. Do not water during the last week or two before harvesting as it is easier to dig garlic out of fairly dry soil rather than mud and the garlic will store better.

When to Harvest: Garlic leaves signal maturity by beginning to turn brown. Harvest garlic when half the leaves have turned brown and dry. When harvesting remove the garlic from the ground by gently digging first around the bulbs rather than just pulling.

Storing: Be careful handling the bulbs and do not bang them together as that can cause them to bruise and invite storage problems. Get them out of the sun as soon as possible as the sun can scald or cause them to dry too quickly. Dry the bulbs in an airy place at about 70 degrees. When the roots and necks are completely dried, trim the leaves and roots off. It usually takes two to four weeks to get to this point. Store garlic in a cool, airy place with about 40% humidity.

