

How to Plant Garlic



Photo © Peter Lanaty

Choose a garden spot with rich, well-drained soil and at least 8 hours of sun. Here in the Chicago area by the lake (Zone 6a) they can be planted anywhere from the 3rd week of October through the first week of November (dependent on the season's weather but try to time it to about 1-3 weeks before an expected hard frost).

Break the garlic head into cloves but do not remove the dry skin on the individual cloves. Plant each clove pointy side up about 2" deep and 6-8" apart. Cover with soil and then add 3-4" of straw or dried leaves on top as a protective winter mulch.

Thin green shoots will usually grow about 4-6" tall in the fall, die back and then return around April to grow about thigh-high. They do not like to compete with weeds! Harvest scapes in early to mid-June and the bulbs in July once the top third of the plant has started to dry and turn brown.

Spread on a screen or hang the harvested bulbs, with the stem attached, in a dry, warm, not-direct-sun space for about 2 weeks to cure. Then cut off the stem and store the bulbs in a cool, dry place in an open cardboard box (or open-weave wooden basket) with newspaper layered between the bulbs. Depending on the variety, they can last from 3-8 months.

SELECTING GARLIC

Choose a seed garlic from a reputable dealer; it is possible to use organic garlic from the grocery store but you probably won't have the full name or background info about it. (Never use conventional store garlic as it may be treated with growth inhibitors and other chemicals.)

Softneck types store well and are easy to braid, but the cloves are smaller and generally they prefer warmer growing temperatures than our northern climate provides.

Hardneck types thrive with cold winters but tend not to store as well. (There are exceptions like Music). They generally have larger cloves with the bonus of producing edible scapes.

Besides these two categories, there are hundreds of varieties to choose from: mild to spicy, better eaten raw or roasted, large or small, easy to peel or not, purple or red or white or striped. ... It is fun to grow several types and learn your favorites!

Organic Garlic from Henry's Farm

□ French Red Garlic

Hardneck. Rocambole group. 6-10 cloves per head. Easy peel. Complex hot flavor. Late season harvest, stores 2-3 months. Round nicely shaped bulbs with purple splashed coverings. Robust, rich, earthy-tasting garlic.

□ Music Garlic

Mid-season, Porcelain type, high yielding. White skinned with just a blush of pink, this garlic makes big cloves that are easy-to-peel. An aromatic, slightly spicy, incredibly flavorful garlic with potent heat that is balanced by the spiciness. Exceptional shelf life for a Porcelain type, Music will store 9 months to a year. Very cold tolerant.



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