



Growing Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

By Cathy Nikolaidis, LSSMG

If you enjoy all things garlic, why not grow your own garlic starting in October? October is the month to start your garlic outdoors. Garlic is considered a “winter annual” that requires exposure to cold temperatures to create proper bulb development. This process is called “vernalization” and it helps the garlic cloves to develop into bulbs.

Hardneck vs Softneck Garlic

Garlic is divided into two categories: hardneck and softneck garlic. The difference is based on its production of flower stalks, its cold hardiness and its type of clove formation. If you are planning to grow your own garlic, you are advised to purchase “seed stock” garlic from local growers, often at a farmers’ market. Once you have grown garlic, you will have your own stock for the next growing season.

Due to Ontario winter conditions, hardneck garlic is generally recommended. This type develops a long flowering stem, called a scape. When the scapes start to circle, they should be cut from the base of the



plant in early summer (usually June). This allows energy to return to the bulb, promoting larger garlic bulbs at the end of the season. Garlic scapes are edible and can be cooked in a stir fry and made into pesto.

Hardneck garlic varieties are more winter hardy and the cloves tend to be larger than softneck garlic. Hardneck varieties are easier to peel, but only last about 4 to 6 months after harvest. Popular hardneck varieties include: Music, Purple Glazer, Siberian, and Chesnok Red. It is a good idea to plant several garlic varieties in case one type succumbs to disease or performs poorly.

Softneck garlic will store longer and because scapes don't develop, their stems stay soft and are easy to braid. Some softneck varieties are California Softneck, California Early, and Italian Loiacano

Planting Garlic

1. Prepare your soil by adding 2 inches of compost and working this into your soil. It will increase soil nutrients and garlic yield. Note that garlic prefers well draining soil in a sunny location.
2. Crack open the head of the garlic bulb and separate the inner cloves. Leave their papery covering intact. Plant only the largest cloves.
3. Plant the cloves with the pointy end up and about 4" deep. Space the cloves 6 inches apart. Mulch your bed with 12" of straw or leaves for protection.
4. Some gardeners make a map of their garlic planting to locate bulbs in spring. During spring, remove most of the mulch, and pull weeds as soon as possible being careful not to injure the stalks or leaves of the garlic plant.

5. Usually in July, harvest your garlic by using a garden fork or spade. Some of the leaves will have started to turn brown. During a wet summer, you can test harvest readiness by digging up a bulb without brown leaves. When digging, loosen the soil 4-6 inches around the bulb and then lift the entire plant with the bulb attached gently from the soil.



6. Garlic needs to cure or dry for 2 to 3 weeks in a dry well-ventilated area. Tie 5-10 bulbs together with twine and hang.

7. Prepare the garlic for storage by cutting the dried stem close to the bulb using garden cutters and remove the dried roots close to the bulb using kitchen scissors. Store the bulbs in a cool dark location.

For more information:

<https://savvygardening.com/hardneck-vs-softneck-garlic/>

<https://savvygardening.com/garlic-spacing/>

<https://peterboroughmastergardeners.com/2022/10/17/for-garlic-lovers-only-how-to-grow-and-harvest-garlic-in-ontario/>