GARLIC (Allium sativum)

Open package immediately upon receipt. The garlic you have received has been grown especially for seed and has been allowed to remain in the ground for an average of 7–10 days longer than garlic grown for consumption. The brown sheath discoloration and staining are normal. The cosmetic appearance of seed garlic generally does not affect productivity. Heads with broken bulb wrappers are fine for seed stock.

Plant as soon as possible following receipt. If you are unable to plant immediately, seed garlic can be briefly held in storage before planting, as follows.

- **Individual Cloves.** Can be held for up to 2 weeks maximum, preferably in a refrigerator.
- **Whole Heads.** Can be held in a cool, dry location, 50–60°F (10–16°C), with good air circulation, for up to several weeks. Wait to separate cloves from bulb until shortly before planting. Do not refrigerate.

**SITE SELECTION & SOIL FERTILITY**

Garlic performs best when planted in full sun, in well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0–7.0. The addition of compost enhances drainage as well as fertility. Raised beds also help drainage in sites with heavy soil. Poorly drained soil can lead to disease and/or poor bulb formation.

Garlic is a heavy feeder. Prepare the soil in the fall by adding compost or a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer, such as alfalfa meal, according to soil test results. In spring, side dress with a fast-release source of nitrogen, such as fish emulsion, when shoots are 6” tall.

**PLANTING**

Plant garlic from the first fall frost date until as late as November. The goal is to get good root growth but no top growth before winter. (Spring planting results in significantly smaller bulb size at harvest.)

Plant individual cloves approximately 6” apart, in rows 24” apart; or in 3–4 rows per bed, with 6” spacing within and between rows. Push the clove, root end (rounded end) down, about 2–3” into the soil; or, place cloves in a furrow and cover with 2–3” of soil. Cover with a layer of mulch, 3–4” deep, of grass clippings, straw, or leaves.

In spring, consistent soil moisture is important, and especially critical during the bulbing period. Monitor moisture, and water the plot as necessary. Reduce irrigation when garlic is nearing maturity.

Keep the growing area free of weeds; garlic does not compete well with weeds, and weed pressure can reduce bulb size by up to 30%.

To minimize the risk of disease, plant only seed-stock quality garlic, practice a 3–5-year crop rotation out of alliums, ensure good drainage, and scout regularly.

**TOPPING STIFFNECK GARLIC**

Stiffneck garlic varieties form flower stalks, called scapes, which are hard, long, curled stalks that appear 1–2 months after the first leaves. “Top” the plants by cutting the scape from the plant when it begins to curl. Topping encourages the plant to focus energy on growing the bulb rather than the scape. If the scape is not removed, bulb size will be compromised. Left to grow, the scape will produce cloves that are too small to be very useful. The scapes themselves are edible, and excellent in pesto or any dish that calls for garlic.

**Curing & Long-Term Storage**

After harvest, curing (partial drying) is essential to prevent decay during storage. Cure in a warm, shady place with good air circulation. Gentle air flow is important; do not point a fan directly at the curing bulbs.

To avoid potential damage to curing bulbs, avoid high heat and avoid direct sun at high, late-summer temperatures.

Hang in bundles or spread in a single layer on screens or drying racks. Allow to cure until the neck is dry and the outer skin is papery, approximately 2–3 weeks.

Store by braiding softneck types or by tying several heads of stiffneck types together and hanging up the bundle. Alternatively, store by cutting off the tops and placing bulbs in a mesh bag or open container. Keep in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location. Optimal storage conditions: 45–55°F (7–13°C) at 50–60% relative humidity. Garlic stored in the refrigerator is likely to sprout.