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## **GARLIC (*Allium sativum*)**

**Open package immediately upon receipt.** The garlic you have received has been grown especially for use as seed garlic; it has been allowed to remain in the ground an average of 7–10 days longer than garlic grown for more immediate consumption. Any 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.** Ideally, garlic should be in the ground by the end of October. It can be planted later, but this may result in reduced yields. In the North, it is okay to plant garlic as early as Labor Day, though many prefer to wait until later.

**If you are unable to plant immediately, it will be necessary to hold the seed garlic in storage until planted, as follows.**

- Whole Heads can be held in a dark, cool, dry location, 50–60°F (10–16°C), with good air circulation, until planting time. Wait to separate cloves from bulb until shortly before planting; separating heads into individual cloves reduces the shelf life to 2 weeks. *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.

### **CHILLING PERIOD**

Stiffneck garlic requires exposure to cold temperatures prior to planting. Southern growers who do not experience winter temperatures consistently below 40–50°F (4–10°C) should apply a cold treatment: place garlic in a paper bag and refrigerate for 10–12 weeks prior to planting.

### **PLANTING**

**Timing.** *The goal is to get good root growth and to limit top growth before winter.*

Most growers plant somewhere between first frost and Halloween, but it can safely be done as early as September and as late as November.

**It is not uncommon for garlic to begin to sprout if planted when temperatures are consistently between 50–60°F. This should not be cause for alarm.** As cold temperatures resume, shoots will die back, bulbs will enter dormancy, and the garlic should yield as expected the following season. Be sure bulbs are adequately mulched to prevent cold damage.

Planting too late may not allow enough root growth to occur prior to the ground freezing—which may result in a poor stand and smaller heads in the spring. Spring planting results in significantly smaller bulb size at harvest. Southern growers who do not experience cold winters should refer to the “Chilling Period” section above.

**Method.** 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. Alternatively, 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.

## CULTURE

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 direct energy toward 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.

**Note:** Under stressful conditions, softneck types will occasionally develop scapes, similarly to stiffneck varieties.

## HARVEST

Harvest in summer, when the bottom leaves are beginning to yellow and 3–5 lower leaves turn brown. Depending on climate and seasonal conditions, this can occur from June through August. Do not leave the crop in the ground too long, or the bulbs will separate and rot.

Dig garlic with a spading fork, being careful not to bruise the bulbs. Brush off the soil before curing and storing the bulbs.

## 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. The curing process may take longer in periods of cool weather and/or high humidity.

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.