

Year Round Gardening

It's Time to Plant Garlic

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As you reap the fall bounty from your vegetable garden, don't forget that next year's garlic crop should be planted before October 15th.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is one of the easiest vegetables to grow. It requires little space and can be planted in the fall after many other crops have been harvested. Although there are many types of garlic, they can be classified into two broad categories: hardneck (Subspecies: *ophioscorodon*) and softneck (Subspecies: *sativum*). Each has its own characteristics. Hardneck garlic, favored by gourmet chefs, has larger, more flavorful cloves of uniform size and does well in our climate. Hardneck garlic may be purple, purple striped, or white. Some varieties include Spanish Roja, Siberian, German Red and Georgia Fire. Each has a distinctive flavor ranging from mild to very hot.



Photo courtesy of Fredricka Bogardus

Softneck garlic is most likely what you find in the supermarket. It typically has 10-40 smaller cloves, does better in warmer climates and has longer shelf life than the hardneck varieties. Softneck varieties include Inchelium Red, Silver White and Lorz Italian.

Unless you have already purchased your garlic bulbs online, purchase them now from your local garden center for planting in early October. Do not plant garlic from the

supermarket which may be treated with an anti-sprouting agent. When determining how many bulbs to purchase, remember that each bulb has a number of individual cloves. Each clove will be planted to produce an entire bulb.

Select a sunny spot for planting to ensure larger bulbs. Prepare your soil by blending in aged compost and/or sphagnum peat moss. Then plant each clove (with its skin intact) pointed end up 3-4 inches deep and 4-6 inches apart. Garlic will thrive in moist, well-drained soil. Do not let it dry out during its life cycle. Mulch the garlic after it is planted. If cloves sprout during warm fall days, don't be alarmed as those shoots can tolerate the cold winter temperatures. Garlic needs consistent moisture throughout the winter to develop market-sized bulbs. Apply one inch of water per week during dry periods through mid-June to ensure good sizing. Stop watering after this period to encourage maturation and discourage bulb diseases.

Hardneck varieties will develop a flower, known as a scape. Scapes should be cut off when they appear in order to make the bulbs larger. Harvest when the garlic leaves start to turn brown, generally in summer. Using a garden fork, carefully lift each bulb out of the soil. Then cure your harvest on a screen or newspaper in a warm, shaded and well-ventilated location for 2-3 weeks at which point your garlic will be dried ("cured"). Then cut off the leaves leaving about 2 inches of stem and store bulbs in a cool place in paper bags until used. Set aside some large bulbs for planting next October.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by visiting ask.extension.org or by calling a Colorado Master Gardener Volunteer at 520-7684, 9:00 to 12:00 Mondays and Wednesdays.