

Garlic for the Garden

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Garlic grows well throughout the Northwest. There are two types of garlic frequently grown in home gardens: *Allium sativum*, the more commonly cultivated type, and *Allium ampeloprasum*, usually called great-headed or elephant garlic. The latter is more of a novelty because of its large size. Both have much in common. There are several special selections or clones of each.

Garlic is not grown from seed. Bulbs used for planting stock are available from most vegetable seed dealers. Shopping from several catalogs provides opportunities to collect different strains. Fresh garlic bulbs available in grocery stores and produce markets also may be used for planting stock provided they are in good condition.

Garlics also are classified as early and late, referring to the speed of sprout emergence after planting and the subsequent bulbing and maturing. The cloves of early garlic generally are enclosed in white scales, while cloves of late garlic usually are enclosed in pink or purple scales. The scales surrounding the entire bulb are gray to white on the kinds of garlic mentioned here.

Great-headed or elephant garlic is least pungent, followed in rank by early and late in ascending order of strength. There are minor variations among individual selections.

Garlic is a bulbous plant related to onion, chive, and leek. The leaves of garlic have solid, thin blades rather than the more round, tubular, hollow blades of onion leaves. As garlic matures, it produces a fairly smooth, round, dry bulb at the base. Each year the common garlic divides into cloves (usually 10 or more) soon after bulbing. Some bulbs of the great-headed or elephant garlic grown from cloves divide at the end of one growing season, but most often the bulb remains as one solid bulb or large clove called a "round." The stem of the plant is attached to the top of the "round" rather than to the root plate. A "round" planted back for the second year will produce a plant, the bulb of which will segregate into a few very large cloves.

Small, round, very dormant cloves completely enclosed within thick, hard, brown, protective leaves may be found at the base of mature elephant garlic bulbs. Instead of using these small cloves as planting stock, it is better to use them for pickling after removing their leaf cases.

Preparation for Planting

Garlic plants have fairly large and well-developed root systems that reach to depths of more than 3 feet in well-drained soils of the Willamette Valley. Clay loams are better for garlic than sandy soils, provided there is good surface drainage during winter. Surface drainage is improved by planting garlic on beds raised 6 to 8 inches above the natural level of the garden.

Before planting, mix a complete fertilizer (such as 8-24-8) thoroughly with the top 8 to 10 inches of soil. Apply 2 pounds of fertilizer to 100 square feet of soil. In late April or May sidedress the plants with ½ pound of ammonium sulfate to 100 square feet. No additional fertilizer is required.

Select clean, dry bulbs. Carefully break them apart into individual cloves. The bulbs will separate naturally into two sizes of cloves. The larger ones are preferred for planting stock. Do not bruise the cloves. Plant the bulbs the same day they are "cracked" (broken apart).

Planting

Garlic should be handled the same as spring-flowering ornamental bulbs, such as crocuses and daffodils. Plant during October and November for best results. During fall and winter, the root system develops and a little top growth is made. By spring, the plant is already well established and makes rapid top growth as the weather warms up. Large, vigorous tops are necessary to produce large bulbs.

Plant garlic in the open where it will receive full sunlight and no competition from perennial



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plants. To save space on a small raised bed, plant the cloves 3 to 4 inches apart in rows 6 to 8 inches apart. Elephant garlic should be spaced 4 to 6 inches apart in rows 8 to 12 inches apart. If space is not a problem, garlic may be spaced more widely or planted in a single row through the garden.

Plant so that the tops of the cloves are 2 inches beneath the surface of the soil. Planting the cloves with the root end down is not necessary. The clove used as planting stock disintegrates during winter as the plant grows.

Care of Plants

Garlic, like onions, cannot withstand weed competition. Use very shallow cultivation with a sharp hoe to keep the area scraped free of all weeds. Many roots of garlic are near the surface of the soil; damaging them will reduce yields.

Provide enough water during spring and early summer to thoroughly moisten the soil to a depth of 2 feet every 8 to 10 days. Discontinue irrigation as soon as the first plants begin to mature (the tops fall over naturally and become dry).

Thrips usually can be found on garlic leaves throughout the summer, and they are more damaging than generally realized. Thrips give the leaves

a silvery, streaked appearance and may be seen as tiny brownish "threads" along the mid-ribs. Control thrips by applying DDT or malathion as dust or spray. Repeat as necessary.

Harvesting

After all the tops have fallen over and become fairly dry, the bulbs are ready to harvest. This occurs in late August in Oregon. Lift the bulbs carefully with a trowel or spade and place entire plants in the shade to dry for a week or more. After drying, clip off the tops and roots (1 inch from the bulb) or leave the plants intact with the tops of several plants braided together. Gently free the soil from the roots. Handle carefully. Garlic deteriorates rapidly if bruised.

Storage

Garlic may be stored in a mesh bag or slatted crate or hung in braided ropes or bunches from the rafters. Any cool, well-ventilated place will do for storage through the winter months. In very cold areas the bulbs should be protected from freezing.

Save the largest and best-formed bulbs for planting in the fall.