
How to Plant and Grow Great Garlic

Growing garlic is very rewarding, simply because it just really wants to grow in our cool, moist, northern climate. No real fussing, not a lot of attention is required to get a successful harvest. That said, the more fussing and attention you give, the greater your garlic will become!

Garlic is typically **planted in the fall**, about 4-6 weeks before the ground freezes hard for winter. Prepare a site of well-drained, humus-rich and fertile soil for planting - we use 4' wide beds with 4 rows per bed (thus 12" apart). Separate your bulbs into their individual cloves and plant about 2 1/2" - 3" deep, approximately 6"-8" in-row spacing. Cover your cloves with soil and allow the chilly fall temperatures to get those cloves to start developing their root systems. Once the ground really starts to cool down and frost is a daily event, cover your soil with loose mulch (straw, old hay) to provide about a 3"-4" blanket of winter protection.

In Spring, do not pull back the mulch **UNLESS** you notice that shoots are not poking up through the mulch in a uniform fashion. This is an indication that your mulch is matted down and not all shoots can poke through. Otherwise, leave your mulch in place to help keep soil cool, moist and weed-free.

Plants will start to send up their **flowering stalk (the scape)** around early July. Snipping off this stalk encourages more of the plant's energy into the bulb developing underground. Timing is important! The earlier you snip the scape gives you a larger bulb, sacrificing some storage life. Leave your scape on until the the curl starts to straighten, and you increase bulb storage life greatly (plus you get to eat the scapes - delicate garlic flavour that is yummy in pesto!).

It's **harvest time** when you see the leaves of your plants dieing back - beginning of August at Hope Seeds' farm. Each leaf is actually a sheath around the bulb that you'll recognize as the papery bulb wrappers on your cured garlic. Ideally you end up with 2-3 wrappers (leaf sheaths) in tact to store your garlic.

Usually, about 1-2 wrappers are removed or damaged during the harvest, cleaning and curing process.

This all adds up to suggest that you want to harvest when you still have 5-6 green (or **JUST** starting to die back) leaves on your plants. Pull them gently out of the ground and get them into a shady, airy place as soon as possible. Direct sun can damage the quality of the bulbs.

Cure your garlic - prepare it for storage - by hanging it in bundles of 10 in an airy, shady, cool and dry place. Heat, moisture and direct sunlight can delay the curing process, damage bulb quality, and encourage disease (fungi, mould) to grow. The curing process is a slow drying of the plants from the outside-in, locking in all that garlic juiciness for months ahead. You'll know your garlic is cured when the central flowering stalk - the hardneck - is dry and pithy when cut (trim about 1"-2" above the top of the bulb). If it is still juicy, they ain't ready! Typically curing takes 4-6 weeks.

Once cured, clip off the hardneck and gently rub away any dirt from the outer wrappers around the bulb. Trim the roots with scissors. Compost those goodies and store your bulbs in a cool, dark and dry place (**NOT** in the fridge, moist basement or beside the woodstove). Pull out a few of the best bulbs for your planting stock, and start from the top. Voila - beautiful, home-grown, organic garlic for your kitchen!

