

Growing Garlic Guide

Growing garlic is a great way for beginners to get started when growing crops for the first time. Plant garlic cloves in mid October, to ensure the best harvest the following summer. Spring planting is possible but better sized bulbs will result from an autumn sowing. Shop bought garlic can be planted but it is less successful so it is always best to buy bulbs that are certified virus free and bred for local conditions.

Harsh winters can cause problems for garlic growers with either brown stalks or magnificent foliage but only one or two bulbs. In mild regions cloves can be planted out in prepared ground but it is suggested to cover with fleece or cloches to keep frost away. Alternatively they can be planted in seed trays in a green house which will be ready to plant out in March or April.

Garlic is normally ready for harvesting when most of the foliage has turned yellowy-brown. Normally if planted in Oct/Nov the leaves will start to turn brown in June/July. When they are properly brown, dig up the cloves, and dry. If you harvest them too early they will be small, it is best to dig up a couple, if the cloves have not formed, leave them a while longer but if you leave them too long they will start to split and not store well. Planting garlic in spring is fine, although the cloves may not be as big and they may not be as split unless there is late frost around at this time of year.



Planting

1. Grow your garlic in full sun on a site that is not prone to water-logging, this will ensure the bulbs do not rot over winter. Garlic can be planted in raised beds and they will grow very well it needs to grow quickly in order to produce good sized bulbs.
2. Each bulb will consist of up to 20 individual cloves, and it is these cloves which are to be individually planted. Break garlic bulbs into individual cloves ready for planting. Take care not to damage the cloves as this can lead to rotting.
3. In cold areas and to speed up the growth-rate of the crop, plant the cloves in divided seed trays of multi-purpose compost. Water well and place trays in a cool greenhouse or cold frame to grow on.
4. In mild regions dig the soil to a spade's depth before planting. Plant the cloves in well-prepared soil spacing them 10cm apart. A couple of handfuls of bone meal should also be incorporated every square metre. Cover them with cloches in frosty weather.
5. Plant each of the cloves in an upright position so that the tip of each one is just below the surface. The bottom blunt end of the clove should be lowest in the ground with the pointed end just below the soil surface



6. Garlic plants grown in trays will be ready to plant out in March or April. Use a trowel to make a hole and set the plants at the same level as they were growing in the trays.
7. Garlic needs rich soil and lots of sun. In late March and again in mid May, feed the soil with general purpose fertiliser such as Growmore. The pH is also important; this should not be below 6.7. Apart from this, their only other requirement is to keep them free of weeds and in dry conditions water them. They will produce green foliage starting around April time.

Pests

The same pests that affect onions, affect garlic too. These are mainly nematodes (eelworms). These attack the roots and bulbs.

Stem Eelworm is transmitted vegetatively in the cloves so clean stock should always be used for planting. Hot water treatment can be used to control the problem in planting stock as they can reduce yield

Onion Thrips causes foliage damage in warm weather

Onion Maggot Fly causes heavy damage to young crops

Bulb Mite damage leads to bacteria and fungi entering the bulbs and this leads bulb rot.

Leaf Rust is another disease, typically associated with leeks, which can cause significant losses in garlic. Rust infection is promoted by low light and high moisture levels so avoid shade and maintain close attention to watering. Infected plants should be treated immediately either by removal and burning or by spraying with an appropriate fungicide.

It is advised to cover onions and garlic with netting to keep the cats and birds away rather than a cloche as this will let the air get to them. Garlic in particular needs cold air and even frost to help with the formation of cloves. Once they are rooted you can then remove the netting.