



GARLIC GROWING GUIDE—ELEPHANT

Elephant garlic, also called great-headed or Oriental garlic, is more closely related to leeks than to true garlic. But it has the same growth habits as regular garlic, with a few minor differences. This cold hardy allium yields 3-4 cloves that are often the size of regular garlic bulbs, hence the name. It's very mild-flavored, with an onion-like taste.

WHEN TO SOW	SUN / PART SHADE	SEED SPACING	ROW SPACING	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING AFTER THINNING	DAYS TO GERMINATE	DAYS TO MATURITY
Late summer/early fall	Sun	12 inches	3 feet	4-6 inches	N/A	2-31	90+

Soil and Fertilizing

It's best to have your soil tested before planting, so you know what nutrients and pH adjustments may be needed to support your garlic crop. For a thorough soil test, consult your local county extension office.

Elephant garlic requires loose, fertile soil. Add organic matter, to keep the soil loose through the long growing season. If you have soil with a high clay content, add large amounts of compost to beds before planting. Lighter soils that have naturally loose textures need only small amounts of organic matter, or green manures like clover or rye grass.

Fertilize moderately according to your soil test results. DO NOT fertilize once bulbing has begun, as it may hinder bulb development.

Planting

Like true garlic, elephant garlic overwinters where the winters are harsh; in locations with milder winters, it often grows frost-hardy leaves. You can plant from October through January in milder climates, though you may want to plant from September through November where it's colder, to give the plants enough time to develop a healthy root system before winter closes in.

Break the bulb into individual cloves and plant them 4-6 inches deep, at least 12 inches apart. Weed regularly, because like most alliums, elephant garlic has shallow roots and can't handle much competition for resources. You can remove the edible scapes (flower stalks on top) and use them in cooking, or even pickle them.

Watering

Water regularly to keep the soil moist, but not waterlogged. This is especially important during the first few weeks of spring growth, but should be continued during the rapid growth phase.

Harvesting / Storage

When your elephant garlic's leaves start drying out and falling over, stop watering for a few days, then harvest. Don't wait too long, or the cloves will start separating.

In loose soils, you can pull them up by hand; otherwise, loosen and lift the soil with a spading fork. Once you've harvested the bulbs, get them out of the direct sunlight right away. Brush off the soil, but don't wash the roots, since you'll need to cure them later.

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Drying (Curing)

Depending on the ambient humidity, you'll need to cure your elephant garlic for 3-8 weeks in a cool, dark, dry place before storage. Some growers braid the tops together and hang them up in small bunches to facilitate curing. A fan set on low, to ensure good air circulation, will accelerate the curing process. After curing, a tough shell forms around the bulbs.

Next, trim the roots and remove the stalks half an inch above the bulb. Leave the skin on the bulbs, and store your elephant garlic 45-55° F with an ambient humidity of 50% or less. It will last as long as 10 months in storage, and will develop a fuller flavor than fresh elephant garlic.

Special Notes:

Elephant garlic can grow as high as five feet, producing attractive flowers. Some gardeners allow them to develop as ornamentals. However, you'll have larger bulbs if you clip off the flower stalks when they're 8-9 inches tall.

Elephant garlic needs cold weather to divide properly. If you plant in the spring, it will yield cloveless onion-like bulbs called "rounds." If you replant them in the fall (or just leave them in the ground) they'll form normal bulbs by the following spring.

Little bulblets called "corms" may also develop outside a garlic bulb. Some gardeners toss them, but you can plant them to produce more garlic. After scoring, soak them in water overnight and plant them. The developing plants will be smaller than those started from cloves, and will produce only rounds the first year. These can be cooked like pearl onions and are very tasty. If you plant the rounds a second year, however, you'll end up with a regular bulb with 4-6 large cloves.

For soil testing or other questions specific to your growing climate, please contact your local county extension agent.

Visit <http://www.almanac.com/content/cooperative-extension-services> to find the office nearest you.