



## GARLIC GROWING GUIDE— HARDNECK AND SOFTNECK

Garlic comes in two basic types: hardneck, which has a woody stem, and softneck, which is stemless, producing only frost-hardy leaves above ground. Both yield bulbs that split into multiple individual cloves, and there are numerous varieties of each type.

Softneck garlic produces more cloves than hardneck, but hardneck cloves tend to be stronger and hotter in flavor. Softneck cloves typically store longer than their hardneck counterparts.

The following chart assumes you're planting from cloves, which is the standard way to propagate garlic.

WHEN TO SOW	SUN / PART SHADE	SEED SPACING	ROW SPACING	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING AFTER THINNING	DAYS TO GERMINATE	DAYS TO MATURITY
See Planting Section Below	Sun	4-6 inches	15-24 inches	1-4 inches	N/A	3-14	80-90
See Planting Section Below	Sun	4-6 inches	15-24 inches	1-4 inches	N/A	3-14	45-70

### 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.

Garlic of both types requires loose, fertile soil. Add organic matter so soil remains 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, as soon as your garlic starts to grow. A side-dressing of strong compost or chicken manure will give your garlic a nice boost.

*Note:* DO NOT fertilize once bulbing has begun. Fertilizing is useless then, and can even be harmful.

### Planting

Garlic survives bitterly cold winters underground, or grows frost-hardy leaves where winters are mild to moderate.

*North.* Plant garlic 4-6 weeks before the ground freezes. In areas with very harsh winter conditions plant softneck garlic in the spring.

*South.* Where winters are milder, plant garlic October through January.

Break the bulb into individual cloves. Small cloves usually grow small bulbs, so plant only the larger ones. Use the smaller cloves in your kitchen. Plant cloves an inch deep, root side down, where the winter is mild.

Where the winter is severe, plant cloves 2-4 inches deep and mulch lightly immediately after planting. In spring, the garlic will have no trouble pushing through an inch of mulch. Minimum spacing on raised beds is 4 x 8 inches. To grow the largest bulbs, try spacing your plants 6 x 12 inches apart.



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### **Planting (Continued)**

After your garlic has overwintered, it must be kept well-weeded, as it has shallow roots and can't handle much competition for resources. Garlic overwinters where the winters are harsh; in locations with milder winters, it often grows frost-hardy leaves that really take off when the weather warms up in the spring.

### **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**

Because time to maturity varies according to the weather each year, watch the plants instead of the calendar. The leaves will start to turn brown from the bottom up. Every few days, scrape soil away from a bulb to check its maturity. If it looks too small or the skin is still loose, cover it back up and pat down the soil. Once you have nice-sized bulbs and the skin is tight, stop watering for a few days, then harvest.

In loose soils, you can pull up your garlic plants 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 dry and cure them later.

### **Drying (Curing)**

Depending on the ambient humidity, you'll need to cure your garlic for 3-8 weeks in a cool, dark, dry place before storage. You can braid together softneck types in bundles of 8-12 plants and hang them to cure. You can also spread them out in a single layer on drying racks or screens. A fan set on low, to ensure good air circulation, will accelerate the curing process. After curing, trim the roots and remove the stalks half an inch above the bulb. Leave the skin on the bulbs.

Garlic stores best at 45-55° F at low humidity. Storage below 40° F makes garlic sprout.

### **Special Notes:**

Your garlic cloves need to be exposed to temperatures below 65° F or they won't form bulbs. Don't let hardneck put its energy into flower stalks, or you'll end up with a substandard bulb. To maximize your yield, cut the seed stalks off when they reach 8-9 inches tall. These "scapes" add a nice garlicky flavor to stir-fry and other dishes.

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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.