

# Garlic! For the home gardener

*By Bettylou Sandy*

Garlic grows through the winter!



Garlic is planted outside in **October**  
then harvested in **July**

- Plant outside in a bed
- Plant around the perimeter of a garden to protect it from voles and other grazing mammals
- This also allows for other crops to be planted and harvested within the space in the spring

For those who like garlic, there is nothing better than your own fresh from the garden! Better flavor texture and quality, and less expensive too!

Garlic is relatively easy to grow in our area of Connecticut, but most people seem to have lost the knowledge, or interest in growing it themselves for almost two generations. The interest has increased in recent years, so some explanation seems to be in order.

Garlic is a “bulb” that is planted by “cloves” taken from the outer layer of the bulb. For this reason, local, fresh garlic with four or five large cloves are the best choice for planting. Local, fresh garlic is important because most garlic sold in our large grocery stores comes from China. Most farmer’s markets, farm stands and organic produce sections will have garlic that is suitable. Mail order companies like “High Mowing” or “Johnny’s Seeds are also a few possibilities for garlic.

**Planting garlic** is a matter of time, temperature, space and forethought.

- **Time:** The time of year to plant garlic is important, because the Garlic clove needs the cold winter to develop the bulb underground. If the soil is too warm, the clove will sprout and use its energy for the foliage, rather than the root and the bulb production.
- **Space:** Unlike most foods that are grown in the home garden, garlic takes space that will not be available until July. For this reason, I recommend planting around the perimeter of a bed, to protect plantings from predators, or down the middle of a future bed of tomatoes, or in a bed of their own that will not be needed until July or August.
- **Forethought:** With planting garlic, the need for planning the future crops in the garden through the various seasons is vital. Spring cold crops beginning in March and April are followed by warm crops in May, the cold crops in August, so the garlic needs to be included in that planning.

Before planting garlic, make sure the **soil is loose and rich**. Prepare the soil by loosening the soil and adding composted manures, or plant through existing mulch of a bed.

Each clove has a pointed end and a flatter end. **The flatter end** is planted six inches deep in the soil and six inches from the next clove to be planted. Space is important so the clove will have room to grow and there will be enough nutrition and moisture for all of the plantings.

**After the heavy frost** and the ground gets cold, the garlic can be covered with a mulch of six inches of straw or two feet of leaves. The straw will compress to an inch of mulch through the winter and the leaves will compress to two inches of mulch through the winter. Both mulches will keep the soil temperature more consistent for the growing garlic and will also keep the biodiversity happy to further fertilize the plants.

In **late February or early March** (depending on the weather), loosen the mulch with a pitch fork to allow more air for the soil. Do not remove it, or turn it, just loosen it to let everything breathe. This will also allow the green stems to shoot up through the mulch to help the bulb grow.

Make sure the garlic is well watered from March through June by rain or human to promote good growth. Most years we have sufficient rain to take care of the needs, but it is good to keep track of the amount of rainfall. One inch a week is best. By mid-June there is no need to water the garlic, most years. It is best to let the soil dry a bit before harvest in July.

In **June** the “**Scapes**” of foliage will be tall and twist and ready to cut to help keep the energy in the bulb. Scapes can be harvested and used in your salads or cooking for a nice flavor enhancer. Some people like to sauté them as a fine vegetable or pesto.

Around **mid-July**, or so, the garlic will be ready to **harvest** when most of the leaves dry, or yellow. Dig up the bulbs, knock off the soil and hang to dry in a cool, shady space with lots of air circulation so they can dry for four to six weeks. These can be in loose bunches tied with elastic bands on hooks or hung by close pins on a line or some other idea as long as they are high and dry. The roots of the bulb can be removed at any time in the drying process to encourage the proper cure.

In our area it is best not to allow the newly harvested bulbs to be in the direct sunlight, as the bulbs need to slowly cure in a cool, shady space.

Do not try to wash the garlic to remove the soil, as it will also remove the beneficial oils that protect the bulb. When the bulb is fully cured, the outer bulb wrapper may be removed to improve the appearance, but is not necessary otherwise.

**Test for proper cure** by cutting the stems of one of the bulbs to an inch from the bulb. If there is a strong scent of garlic, the bulb is not yet sealed and the others will need more time to cure.

**When the garlic has cured**, the stems may be cut off to one inch above the bulb and stored in a cool dry place with plenty of good ventilation. Do not allow the garlic to be in cold temperatures, especially a refrigerator, as those temperatures and humidity will cause the bulb to sprout, causing a loss of flavor and quality.

**Save some of the best bulbs** for your next planting in October to begin the process all over again!

## *Happy Gardening!*

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