

Garlic

HOW TO PLANT:

Choose a sunny site and loosen the planting bed to at least 12 inches deep. Thoroughly mix in a 1-inch layer of compost. In acidic soils, also mix in a light dusting of wood ashes. Wait until just before planting to break bulbs into cloves. Poke the cloves into the ground 4 inches deep and 6 to 8 inches apart, with their pointed ends up. Cover the planted area with 3 to 5 inches of organic mulch, such as hay or shredded leaves.

HARVESTING & STORING:

From early summer to midsummer, watch plants closely and pull them when about one-third of the leaves appear pale and withered. Use a digging fork to loosen the soil before pulling the plants. Handle the newly pulled bulbs delicately to avoid bruising them. Lay the whole plants out to dry in a warm, airy spot that is protected from rain and direct sun. After a week or so, brush off soil from the bulbs with your hands and use pruning shears to clip roots to half an inch long. Wait another week before clipping off the stems of the hardneck varieties or trimming and braiding softnecks into clusters. Do not remove the papery outer wrappers, as these inhibit sprouting and protect the cloves from rotting.

Storage life varies with variety and growing and storage conditions. When kept at 50 to 60 degrees (Fahrenheit), rocamboles store for about four months, other hardneck garlic varieties usually last six months and softneck and elephant garlic store for eight months or more. Hang your cured crop in mesh bags or braid softneck types and suspend from rafters in a cool basement or garage.

GARLIC PEST & DISEASE PREVENTION TIPS:

Tiny onion thrips rasp pale grooves into garlic leaves, but they have many natural predators. Keep areas near garlic and onions mowed to reduce the weedy habitat thrips prefer. Monitor populations with sticky traps and use a spinosad-based biological pesticide to control serious infestations.

Onion root maggots seldom infect garlic planted in soil where onion family crops have not been planted for two years, but the mobile adults may still lay eggs around the base of young plants. Where pest pressure is severe, dust the area around plants with diatomaceous earth in late spring, which is when the egg-laying females are the most active.

Prevent fusarium and other soilborne root rot diseases by growing garlic in well-drained fertile soil. Avoid injuring the roots when weeding because diseases often enter plants through broken tissue.

GROWING TIPS:

Experiment with types and varieties because each reacts differently to weather and rainfall patterns. A spring hot spell that bothers one variety may benefit another.

To grow garlic greens for cooking, plant whole bulbs 12 inches apart in the fall. In spring, when the greens are 10 inches tall, grab them with one hand and use the other to lop them off with a knife. You should get two more cuttings before the plants give out.

You can make garlic powder by drying thinly sliced garlic at 150 degrees (Fahrenheit) until it's crisp. Grind to a fine powder in a food grinder or blender.