

Garlic

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

A garlic bulb (or 'head') is made up of cloves and is a member of the onion family. There are two basic categories, Hardneck and Softneck, of which there are many different varieties. Hardnecks produce an average of 5-9 large cloves per head and exhibit a wide range of flavors. At maturity this plant's stalk is stiff thus its name. Because they have less of an outer bulb wrapper/skin (sometimes none), Hardnecks have a shorter shelf life than that of Softneck varieties.

For a "classic" garlic flavor, longer shelf life and the best storage qualities, consider choosing a Softneck variety. At maturity Softneck garlic stalks are soft and pliable which is why this type of garlic is used for garlic braids. Resulting from the white papery skin covering each clove, Softneck garlics have a long shelf life and the best storage qualities. Varieties of this type of garlic are the most commonly grown.

Examples of Hardneck garlic varieties include 'Bavarian Purple,' which has a mid-season yield of 7 or 8 cloves per bulb/head and a sharp, spicy flavor that leaves no aftertaste. Being medium-hot in flavor, 'Music' is another mid-season variety that yields 5 or 6 large cloves per head (25 to 30 cloves per pound) and is very cold tolerant.

Of the Softneck group, 'California Early' and 'Italian Purple' are two widely grown varieties. 'California Early' produces 10-12 plump cloves per head and has a mild flavor. Also mild in flavor (which intensifies with storage) is 'Italian Purple.' It averages 6-10 cloves per head. When storing garlic, no matter the variety, choose a cool, dry, dark, well-ventilated location. The container in which the bulbs are stored must also be well-ventilated, such as a mesh bag or wicker basket.

PLANTING AND GROWING

For a successful garlic crop, plant it in rich, well-drained soil that has a pH of 6-7 and is sited in full sun (minimum of 6 hours of direct sunlight per day). In our area, it is best to plant garlic October through early November for the best performance the following summer.

If you have not yet amended your soil with compost (either homemade or Black Forest), do so prior to planting. It can never hurt to mix Bumper Crop into the soil as well!

Begin by separating the cloves from the bulb. Spacing each clove 4 to 6 inches apart from one another, plant one clove per hole. At the time of planting, add bone meal or organic bulb fertilizer, according to package directions, to each hole. Tuck each clove into its hole by covering it with 1 to 2 inches of soil.

When spring growth begins, fertilize each plant again with an organic fertilizer with a high nitrogen base. Continue to do so every 2 weeks until late spring. If flower stalks appear, cut them off---this keeps the plant's energy focused instead on growing the bulb.

Depending on the variety planted, it will be time to harvest your garlic in late May through the summer months. Remember! Wait until 3 or 4 green leaves appear before harvesting.