

Getting to Know and Grow Garlic

By Christy Shivell of Shy Valley Native Habitat Nursery and Herbarry

www.shyvalley.com 423/348-6570

Garlic has been valued for millennia as a potent flavoring and a powerful medicine. It is an antiseptic, antihelminthic, aphrodisiac, digestive, immune, and circulatory stimulant, and much more. It is said to cure every ailment except garlic breath! Health benefits are primarily derived only from garlic in its raw state.

All true garlic is botanically classified as *Allium sativum*. There are two varieties within the species, ophioscorodon and sativum. The ophioscorodons are the “hardneck” garlics. The sativums are the softnecks. (Elephant garlic is not a true garlic, and is classified as *Allium ameloprasum*. It is actually a kind of leek.)

Hardneck	versus	Softneck
also called topset or serpent garlic and includes Rocamboles, Continental and Asiatic types		includes the artichoke and silverskin types
forms a central flower stalk and bulbils		don't usually form scape or bulbils
shorter storage life		better keepers
closest to wild garlic		most highly domesticated garlic
various varieties often have intense flavor		flavor varies from mild to intense
not braidable because of hard, woody scape		braidable
requires less input from the gardener		requires good culture to reach potential
produces 6 to 10 good, large cloves		produces 18 to 24 cloves, some varieties even more, cloves vary in size

Growing garlic is easy!

1. Garlic requires full sun and rich, well-drained soil. Work lots of organic matter into bed prior to planting. Raised beds are ideal, but not a necessity.
2. Plant healthy, large cloves before the end of the year, preferably in October. Smaller cloves may be eaten or planted to produce garlic “scallions”. Crack bulbs into cloves just before planting, and plant them 4-6 inches apart, in rows about a foot apart. Lettuce may be interplanted.
3. Garlic’s primary enemy is weed infestation. Keep garlic beds well mulched from day one to keep them weed free. Use a rich, organic mulch, such as chopped leaves or grass clippings and compost, and replenish often.
4. Supply a steady supply of moisture through the growing season (spring). You want to shoot for combined moisture from rainfall and watering to equal about 1 inch per week. Stop watering around June 1st.
5. Work generous amounts of organic fertilizer, such as compost or aged manure, into beds at planting, and side dress every couple of weeks with compost. Fish emulsion or other organic feeds are good, too. Stop fertilizing on May 1st.
6. Garlic will be ready to harvest when the bottom third of the leaves are turning brown, but most of the upper part of the leaves is still green. Check a bulb to see if it has a dry, papery wrapping around each clove, and the bulging cloves are just discernable under the outermost wrapper. If so, start digging! Different varieties mature at different times.
7. Harvest by prying with a garden fork and *gently* pulling each plant. Harvest on a dry day, and allow to dry in place for a couple of hours, then move to a dry sheltered area out of direct sun to dry for a couple of weeks.
8. When the dirt clinging to the bulbs is dry enough to brush off easily, do so, cleaning the entire bulb well. Wait until the entire plant is completely dry to trim the roots and tops. Garlic may be braided for storage, as well, but I have personally never mastered the technique.

The Garlic Store has a great write up on growing garlic on its web site. For *lots* more information, you may wish to read [Growing Great Garlic](#), by Ron L. England.