

# How to grow garlic

## Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

Family: Alliaceae (Onion)  
 Season: Cool  
 Ease of growing: Moderate  
 Nutrient needs: Medium  
 Water needs: High  
 Common propagation: Cloves

## Planning facts

Spacing: 4" x 18"  
 Plants per square foot: 9

## Variety selection

There are two types of garlic: hardneck and softneck. Hardneck garlic, sometimes called "stiffneck," forms a woody stem as it matures. It is best for northern climates, like Michigan, because of its greater winter hardiness. Some garlic is striped purple, some is best for storing and others have unique flavors.

## Preparation and planting

In general, the cultural requirements for garlic are very similar to those of onion. A good sandy-loam soil rich in organic matter and ample nutrients are needed for optimum growth. Garlic is a cool-season crop and one of the hardiest vegetables in the garden. It is not damaged by frost or light freezing. One-half pound of cloves will yield about 5 pounds of garlic. Plant in the fall, four to six weeks before the ground freezes. Plant 1" to 2" deep with the pointed end up and mulch with straw to protect against severe weather. Spring planting is possible but will result in small bulbs.

## Care

Garlic will not grow well if the soil is dry or if weed competition is strong. If the soil is dry, water thoroughly after planting. Generally, little irrigation is needed during the cool days of fall and early spring. When temperatures warm up the following summer, garlic benefits from about 1 inch of water per week. Keep the plants weed-free, especially during establishment. As the plants grow and mature, remove any scapes as they appear. This will help increase bulb size. Scapes can be used to flavor your favorite dish.

## Major pests

**Insects:** Onion thrips, onion maggot, bulb mite.

**Diseases:** Basal rot, white rot, downy mildew, botrytis rot, pink root.

## Harvesting and storage

Garlic is ready to harvest when the tops yellow and begin to droop. Cloves are generally ready to harvest by mid-July. You can hasten the bulb curing process by rolling the tops and adding no additional water. To harvest, loosen the soil with a fork, remove the bulbs and place them in a shady location. Allow the garlic to dry a few days until the skins become papery. Move them indoors to a cool, dry spot for curing if the weather is rainy. Spread them out to ensure good air circulation. Once the bulbs are completely dry, you may braid them for hanging or trim down the tops and roots close to the bulb and store in mesh bags in a cool, dry area. If storage conditions are good, they will keep up to a year.

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