



Toronto
Green
Community

ALL ABOUT GARLIC!

Growing Garlic

In Canada most varieties of garlic, under most conditions, do best when planted in the fall. The timing of fall planting should be such that the roots have a chance to develop and the tops do not break the surface before winter, about three weeks before the ground freezes. In some regions spring planting is traditional.

Plant garlic in single or double rows or in wide beds of four to six plants across with four to eight inches between plants. Tighter spacing in the beds will produce a greater number of smaller bulbs for a higher total yield. It is important to plant garlic with the top (pointed end) of the clove up, at least two inches below the surface. To help maintain consistent soil moisture and temperature, mulch bulbs with straw, woodchips, leaves or any other carbon-based material. Mulching can also shelter rodents, so keep an eye on your beds. It is also not recommended in wetter climates where excess water can be a problem for garlic.

Garlic does not like repeated freezing and thawing. A thick layer of winter mulch is a good insurance against winter kill. Garlic does not like extreme heat either and mulch will moderate the daily fluctuations in summer soil temperatures, as well as help the soil retain moisture during droughts.

Scapes are the top portions of the plant that curl and, if left alone, will develop the seeds or bulbils. The scapes are edible, and can be snapped off around June, when they form one loop. Steam them like asparagus for a delicious early summer treat!

Harvesting Garlic

Fall garlic is usually ready to harvest by mid- late July, when there are around 6 dried leaves visible. To determine whether the garlic is ready to harvest inspect a few bulbs in the ground by carefully scraping away the dirt. You can feel the bumps of the cloves through the wrappers of a mature bulb. Lift the garlic from the ground when the bulb has reached a good size and before the wrappers begin to deteriorate or the bulbs begin to split open. If a bulb is not well-wrapped, and the skins on the cloves are not intact, the garlic will not keep well.

Did you Know? Garlic can get sunburned and some varieties of garlic change flavour when left in the sun. Keep freshly harvested bulbs out of direct sunlight.

Curing Garlic

After garlic is harvested it needs to be cured. In curing the energy from the leaves goes into the bulbs as they dry. Remove any chunks of dirt from the roots, being careful not to bruise the garlic. Leave the roots on as they have a moderating effect on the drying rate. Bundle the plants together in bunches of 4 to 6, being careful not to have the bulbs touching each other. Hang the bundles out of direct light, in an area with good air circulation, at a temperature of around 25°C for approximately two weeks. Garlic should keep for 6 to 8 months if stored in a cool, stable room temperature.

Why is Garlic Good For You?

Garlic is used to help prevent heart disease, including atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries (plaque buildup in the arteries that can block the flow of blood and may lead to heart attack or stroke), high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and to boost the immune system. Eating garlic regularly may also help protect against cancer.

Garlic is rich in antioxidants. In your body, harmful particles called free radicals build up as you age, and may contribute to heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. Antioxidants like those found in garlic fight off free radicals, and may reduce or even help prevent some of the damage caused over time. Source: University of Maryland Medical Centre- Medical Reference Guide (<http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/herb/garlic>)

Important Tip: Heat destroys allicin, the germ-fighting compound released when you crush garlic. If you want to use garlic to battle infection, only add it to liquids that have cooled to the point of drinking temperature, or for use with children, crush cloves of garlic and rub them on their feet and put socks on.

FUN, LOCAL GARLIC EVENT: Toronto Garlic Festival – An annual event (generally in September) hosted by Evergreen Brick Works, celebrating all things garlic! See www.torontogarlicfestival.ca for more information.

Toronto Green Community

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