

BY CAROL WHARTON  
Littleton Garden Club

# Grow your own garlic

A lot of my friends and neighbors have large vegetable gardens but only one includes garlic.

I am the opposite ...I have a small vegetable garden that is mostly garlic.

Why? It is easy, predictable with no predators, definitely cost saving and has a 7000 year history.

Several years ago I ordered my seed garlic bulbs from an on line garlic farm in the spring when the supply for the variety I needed was available. Each year since then I choose my

nicest bulbs to replant. So it is a one time expense that pays for itself easily with your first crop.

On line garlic farms will suggest best varieties for New England... suppliers sell out, so order early. Cost varies with the amount and variety you are buying. I began with half a pound of hard neck porcelain for \$22 from Fedco Seeds. You will be amazed at the varieties you can choose from.

If you are planning a fall planting this year, you may want to ask a friend for some of their newly harvested and dried bulbs which you will then divide into cloves to plant.

Best not to buy conventional garlic sold in stores as it may well have been treated with a chemical to keep it from sprouting and may not be the hard-neck variety which is recommended for New England. So know your source ...organic bulbs may work well.

Choosing your bed is key: full sun, well drained rich soil, not wet, with beds that are at least 6 inches deep. Raised beds work well but not necessary.

Best to give garlic its own bed so that plants can get maximum sun away from other plantings and will be easier to weed and harvest. Each bulb gives five cloves ...hence five plants.

Plant before the first hard frost usually late Oct and early November so the roots have a chance to get established. To begin, separate each bulb into

cloves, leaving the paper skin-like covering on the clove.

Create a furrow the length of your intended row using a tool that loosens the soil.

Plant your cloves pointy end up, root end down about three inches deep and four inches apart in rows that are 8 inches apart. You can add fertilizer at this point ...I have used a little sprinkle of Pro Gro... then cover with soil and pat down.

Mulch generously with 10 inches of straw. Do not skip this step. it protects plants, controls weeds and will reduce down by half the following July.

Forget about your plants until spring when they emerge from their straw bed.

In June the garlic plants will begin to flower...long curved stems with a flower bulb at the end.

This stem is called a scape and should be snapped off to strengthen the still growing garlic bulbs. Scapes are edible, have a mild garlic flavor and are sold in grocery stores. They also add interest in flower arrangements!

Harvesting begins late July and early August when the lower two leaves turn brown.

Pull the mulch away from the base of the plant. Using a small spade gently loosen the soil from around the plant being very careful to not touch/ cut the somewhat soft bulb with the spade. I use my fingers as a guide to expose the size of the bulb.

Once you have loos-

ened the soil sufficiently around the bulb, pull the stem straight up.

Resist removing the soil. Shake bulb gently and set aside. Do not wash. The outside skins are soft and need to dry.

The last step is to dry the garlic bulbs in an area where air is circulated and dry. Place the garlic and stems on a piece of wire fencing for about 10 days, not touching one another to allow air circulation. Then using a soft brush clean the dirt from the bulbs and trim the roots using

scissors. Tie the garlic in bunches of 6 to 8 bulbs using twine and hang them by the stem for about 4 weeks in the same area. Finally cut the stems one inch from the bulb. Set aside the

best (largest) bulbs to replant...assuming you are already planning next year's crop!

Store your bulbs in the coolest part of your house/ garage in an open container ... 45 -60 degrees.

They store well until spring and longer.

If you have bulbs that were damaged, use them first

If harvesting is delayed, bulbs may begin to split ...use these first as well.

If clove is planted upside down, bulbs will be smaller and shaped like a hook!

Garlic may be crushed, stored in small jars covered with olive oil and kept in the freezer.

Garlic also makes great gifts!

I do hope this Garlic 101 will entice you to try.