

The goodness of garlic

THE TIME IS NOW TO PLANT THIS FAVORITE, FLAVORFUL KITCHEN STAPLE

LARRY SUTTON
Master Gardener

“Stop and smell the garlic! That’s all you have to do.” – William Shatner

Question: I would like to raise my own garlic. What can you tell me about it? Is it easy to grow? When and how should I plant it?

Answer: I grew up in Kansas and Oklahoma during the '40s in a garlic-free environment. Salt and pepper were the strongest seasonings in the house. Fortunately, on many fronts, I married a beautiful Italian woman who introduced me to a lot of fascinating things, and garlic has remained close to the top of the list.

“There are many miracles in the world to be celebrated and, for me, garlic is the most deserving.” – Felice

Leonardo (Leo) Buscaglia (1924-1998)

The first step is to decide what kind of garlic you want. According to Jim Leet, garlic purveyor at the Umpqua Valley Farmers Market, we have three types to choose from: hardneck garlic, softneck garlic and elephant garlic. The latter is not really a garlic but a leek. Jim will tell you the elephant garlic was the only herb that Noah did not allow on the ark because Noah didn't want any leeks in the ark. Jim's sense of humor aside, he does know his garlic and can always be counted on for good garlic advice.

Hardneck garlic comes in several varieties that include Korean, Siberian, Music, Chesnock Red, German Red and Spanish Roja. The hardneck varieties can be distinguished by their flowering stalks with tiny bulb-lets on the end. Hardneck, otherwise

known as top setting garlic, is known for its richer, more pungent taste. Common varieties of softneck garlic include Silverskin, Inchelium Red, California Early and California Late. The softneck varieties focus all of its growing energy into the below ground bulbs and thus produces a larger bulb. Finally elephant garlic is known for producing larger, milder tasting cloves with typically fewer bulbs than the true garlic.

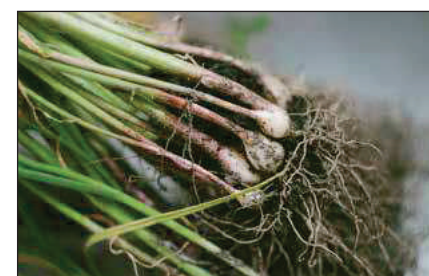
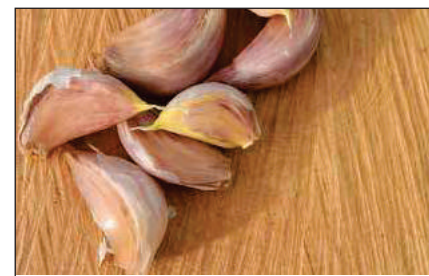
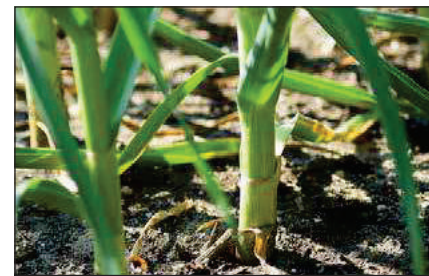
How much garlic to plant is a matter of personal taste. The best time to plant it is now, let it grow through the winter and harvest it in the spring to summer. Garlic loves slightly limed soil prepared before planting with a 5-10-10 fertilizer worked into the area below where the garlic will grow. In the early spring, treat the garlic with a side of natural (blood meal or composted chicken manure) or synthetic nitrogen fertilizer. Finally, apply a last feeding in May.

“You can never have enough garlic. With enough garlic, you can eat The New York Times.” – Morley Safer

For your true garlic, plant the bulbs root down about two inches deep. Jim's secret for growing large garlic bulbs is to plant large cloves. He says the bigger the clove, the larger the bulb at harvest. Space them 2 to 4 inches apart. For your true garlic, space the rows about a foot apart. For elephant garlic, you can reduce the row separation by 6 inches. A 10-foot row will produce about 5 pounds of garlic.

In our area, winter rains usually provide enough water for growing garlic. If the winter rains stop early, give your garlic a deep watering every week to 10 days. By mid-June you will want to let your beds dry out in preparation for harvest. Keep weeds out of your garlic garden; young garlic cannot stand competition. On the other hand, you will not need to be concerned with insects. Local insects are not attracted to it, and in many cases, are repelled by it.

Unlike many below-the-ground



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LARRY SUTTON

Photos from top: Individual plants of garlic that have been grown from cloves. A hardneck garlic broken into individual cloves. A bunch of new garlic starts have grown from a mature head in the ground.

crops, garlic leaves are not a good indication of maturity. In many cases the garlic will be mature and ready to harvest while the leaves remain green. In late June, pull up a garlic bulb and examine it. A mature bulb will have well-developed cloves covered with a thick, dry, papery skin.

When your garlic is ready for harvest, carefully dig it up and store it in a dry well-ventilated space. Do not bruise the bulbs as bruised bulbs do not store well. A few days after harvest, clean the bulbs by brushing and remove the tops and roots. Store your garlic in a dark, dry and well-ventilated area. Do not freeze or expose the bulbs to high humidity as this will encourage sprouting. Carefully stored garlic should last you until the next harvest time, provide a gastronomical delight to your table and enrich your life.

“It is not really an exaggeration to say that peace and happiness begin, geographically, where garlic is used in cooking.” – X. Marcel Boulestin (1878-1943)

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.

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Spanish Roja garlic.

