



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRUCE GRAVENS

Garlic will grow very slowly through the winter and take off in the early spring as the soil warms.

Growing a garden of garlic

Question: Does garlic grow well in the Umpqua Valley? It seems my attempts to grow garlic result in small heads, or they tend to rot or split apart in the ground.

Answer: Yes, garlic grows well in the Umpqua Valley. Garlic is a heavy feeder, and because the head forms a few inches below the surface, they like well-drained soil with an abundance of organic matter and lots of available nitrogen.

I have had success growing all the major subgroups of hard neck (not braidable) garlic and soft neck (braidable) garlic. Generally, hard neck garlic (not available in the grocery store) are more pungent, but do not store as long as soft neck garlic which are milder and will store for the whole season.

Garlic in the grocery stores have been treated to retard sprouting, so they are not good sources of seed garlic. Local garlic sold at our garden supply stores or farmer's markets will work or there are a large number of online sources of seed garlic. Once you have grown your own garlic, you can reuse a portion of your harvest as seed garlic for the next year. There is no exchange of DNA in this process, so all of your garlic will be clones of the garlic you started with.

Traditionally, garlic is planted around the second week of October and I find that date works



Bruce Gravens
Ask a Master Gardener

well in the Umpqua Valley. I prepare my garlic beds by digging in 8-12 inches of compost and allowing it to rest for at least two weeks before planting. Dig out a walking path between the rows to improve drainage.

I work in a good bit of balanced fertilizer and install an irrigation system that does not wet the leaves. I use t-tape drip irrigation. Garlic has short roots, so it is important that sources of water and fertilizer are available close at hand.

I then plant the garlic on 5 inch centers. The biggest cloves will produce the largest heads, so be selective. Place the clove 1-2 inches in the ground with the root end down. If the clove is planted on its side, the garlic head will not form correctly.

Cover the cloves with soil and cover the whole bed with a few inches of compost. This compost will reduce the compacting effect of the winter rains. Irrigate on a regular basis until the winter rains take over. In a few weeks, you should start to see the garlic sprouting.

Once the winter rains get



Garlic, with stalks intact, should be left to dry for two to three weeks in a warm, dry environment after harvesting.

going, apply fertilizer and let the rain wash it into the soil. Apply fertilizer again in late January and late March. Your garlic will grow very slowly through the winter and take off in the early spring as the soil warms. Restart irrigation as the rains taper off.

If you are growing hard neck garlic, cut the scape (flower stalk) off just above where it comes out of the garlic stalk as soon as possible. This will encourage a larger head.

In early July, reduce the irrigation and prepare to harvest the garlic. Once a third of the outer leaves begin to dry, it is time to harvest. If you wait too

long, the heads will split into separate cloves and will not store well.

It is critical for long-term storage that you are very gentle when harvesting the garlic. Using a digging fork, gently lift the garlic heads and attached stalk out of the soil. Do not pull them out by the stalk. Be gentle removing soil stuck to the heads and roots. It's better to let it dry and fall off than to damage the heads.

Place the garlic with stalks intact on racks to cure and dry for two to three weeks, out of direct sunlight, in a warm (80 degree) and dry (less than 40% humidity) environment. Once

the garlic has cured, gently clean off the soil, trim back the roots and cut the stalk off a couple inches above the head.

Store the garlic in a cool (about 65 degree, 50% humidity) dark place like a basement or root cellar. Expect your hard neck garlic to last for about six months while your soft neck garlic should be good until the next harvest is ready.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.