



Garden Tips & Techniques: Planting Garlic

Here at Grow Pittsburgh, we find garlic to be one of the most satisfying garden crops. So satisfying, that we need a bulleted list to show you all the reasons!

- Garlic can grow in many soil types
- It's a tough and fairly fool-proof plant
- It's easy to save your own seed from year to year
- The spiky tall leaves add interesting texture to the garden
- You can cure your own garlic to cook with it throughout the year
- Homegrown garlic tastes great
- Plant garlic now, for a harvest next July!

There are two main types of garlic:

Hardneck This type of garlic is named for its stiff stem. It boasts large, easy-to-peel cloves, but not many papery outer layers, which means it doesn't store as well as softneck garlic. In the late spring, this type of garlic will send up a seedhead, or "scape," which should be clipped from the plant, and is edible. Hardneck garlic fares better in Northern winters than softneck. Common varieties: Music, Spanish Roja, German Extra Hardy, Siberian.

Softneck Most supermarket varieties are softneck, as these varieties store very well. Softneck garlic has many small cloves, with lots of papery skins protecting the head. Softneck garlic doesn't handle cold winters as well as hardneck garlic. Since the stems of softneck garlic are flexible, they can be braided together. Common varieties: Polish White, California Early, Silverwhite Silverskin.

We usually plant hardneck garlic, since it does so well in our climate. Also, it's so darn easy to peel, which makes it quick to prepare in the kitchen!

How to plant garlic:

Garlic is most often planted by separating individual cloves from a head of garlic (leaving the papery layers ON the clove), then placing those cloves in the ground. Here are some tips:

1. Purchase seed garlic online, or from a garden supply center. Or, buy interesting varieties at your local farmers market. Some supermarket garlic has been treated to delay sprouting, so avoid purchasing this garlic for seed.

2. Prepare the planting area. Garlic can grow just fine in many types of soil, but like almost every other food crop it *prefers* rich loamy soil, in full sun. Add a healthy dose of compost to the soil, and loosen the area with a trowel, shovel, or tiller. Other fertilizers will also work, but compost is ideal, since it builds healthy soil structure along with adding nutrients.
3. Right before planting, separate the garlic cloves from the head. Leave the papery skins on each clove intact, as they will protect help protect the seed over the winter.
4. Make a trench and set the cloves upright (pointy end up, flat end down!), about 6 inches apart. Fill in the trench with soil. When covered, the pointy top of the clove should be about 2 inches underground.
5. Cover the garlic bed with several inches of mulch – dried leaves or straw work well.

You can plant garlic anytime from early November through early December, as long as the ground doesn't freeze before then! Depending on the weather this winter, you may see the green tips of your garlic plants poking through the mulch. Garlic is very hardy and will weather the winter just fine; it actually thrives with a winter dormant period, which is why we plant this crop in the fall. If it doesn't grow through the mulch this winter, you can be certain it will be one of the first bits of green you will see in the garden, come early spring. Stay tuned for our next installments of garlic-care tips, which will guide you through the rest of the garlic crop life-cycle!