



## Garden Tips & Techniques: When to Harvest Garlic

Garlic is a fun and easy crop. Planting a garlic *clove* in the fall yields a whole *head* of garlic cloves the following summer! The garlic plant is tall and stalky and green and its familiar-looking white bulb is buried underground. So, how do you know when to harvest?

At our Grow Pittsburgh production sites, we used to simply harvest by a certain date. July 4 was a good average time to harvest, so year after year we'd pull the garlic shortly before or after the holiday. However, the unseasonable, early heat last year caused the garlic to ripen early, and by the time we dug it up in early July, it was over-mature. The garlic still tasted great, but it wouldn't store well. We saved most of it for seed and planted it in the fall.

This year, we've done our homework! Here's what we've found out about the perfect time to harvest garlic:

As heads of garlic mature, the bulb forms and develops divisions – what we call cloves. These cloves size up, and develop skins around each clove, which are what later become the papery coverings. These coverings protect each clove from physical damage and pathogens. If the head of garlic is left in the ground too long, the garlic cloves begin to pull away from the central stalk and the papers begin to split, allowing moisture and soil to get in contact with the cloves. Garlic harvested at this stage (we found out last year!) doesn't store long.

So ideally, garlic is harvested when papers have formed around each clove, but before the cloves begin separating from the main stem. If you had a field of garlic, you would probably simply dig a few heads up to check and see if they were ready to pull. But in a garden, each head is a little more precious! Here's another way to tell that your garlic is ready:

- The plant's 3-4 bottom leaves will be yellow/brown and wilted, and the top 5-6 leaves are still green.

That's it! Some of the outer leaves, surrounding the head, will probably be starting to fall apart, so don't be worried if you see a little of this. If garlic is harvested at the right time, there will still be some intact papers around each head, and individual cloves will still be protected by their own papery layers. Once you've pulled the garlic, store it somewhere dry and warm, but out of the sun, for a couple of weeks. This "curing" process allows the garlic to last in storage. After the garlic is cured, you can trim off the stalks and roots and brush off any remaining dirt before storing the heads somewhere warm, dry, and breezy, in the shade.

Garlic is also tasty fresh (uncured). If you plan to use some of your garlic fresh, clean those heads with water and store them in the fridge for up to a week or so.

*Check out our [Urban Harvester](#) article from last year to find out more about the process of harvesting garlic.*



Garlic, ready to harvest!