

## Garlic Growing for Springfield Master Gardeners 2014

*Experience is what you get when you don't get what you want. - Dan Stanford*

### **We do not have any special expertise in growing garlic,**

We have made all the mistakes, some of them two or more times. Good information is in a variety of web sites on growing garlic, some of it contradictory. Always look at the geographic location as different garlic and climates require different timing.

- We plant mostly Inchelium Red which have the largest bulbs and longest storage life.
- We plant S & H Silver softneck for braiding because of their more flexible necks.
- Persian Star hardneck have the most beautiful flowers. Hardneck garlic can be planted for their flowers and cutting their scapes to eat debatably may produce bigger bulbs. If that is your goal I would stick to softnecks.

### **Planting Garlic**

We plant garlic the middle of September but you can go as late as early October. Prepare the soil with a few inches of compost.

Select your planting stock from the largest bulbs. Be sure that they are healthy, culling out any that show signs of softening or disease. Planting diseased cloves guarantees more disease.

Rotate your beds if at all possible every year as garlic diseases and larvae will stay in the soil for 2-4 years waiting to come on strong with the next year's crop.

Open the bulbs the day you plant. Select the largest cloves of each bulb for planting, saving the smaller inner cloves for eating.

We use a planting stick to create a hole 2" deep but a trowel works as well. Plant the cloves pointed end up, and cover with soil-compost. We plant the cloves 5-6" apart in two parallel zigzag rows a similar distance apart (see below). This way we maintain the spacing but it is easier to water and weed and uses less space. Leave 3 feet between these double rows to allow room to maintain and harvest. We mulch with old hay or wood chips a few weeks later.

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X   X   X   X   X   X   X   X
    X   X   X   X   X   X   X   X
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There are many opinions for maintenance and fertilization, which I will leave to others. In general we fertilize in fall a month after planting and again in spring. We maintain watering until the first week of June and then pray for dry before harvest. Harvesting in wet soil makes the garlic hard to clean and more likely to be injured when their skins are moist.

### **Harvesting Garlic**

Usually garlic is ready for harvest the last week of June or first week of July. The time of harvest depends on the condition of the plants and the weather forecast. Ideally you would like the soil to be dry and we stop watering 2-4 weeks before harvest time. This is the time that the cloves develop fully. The instructions below from website *Gusto Garlic* are approximate and some sources say when 2-3 outer leaves dry out.

"Each leaf of the garlic plant forms a wrapper around the bulb. There are normally 9-11 leaves on the average plant. When the plant matures, the bottom leaves start to turn brown and correspondingly the outer bulb layers begin to deteriorate. When 4-5 leaves have turned brown, this is a good time to harvest, and when you remove the plant from the ground you will see that the outer 1-2 layers have deteriorated.

Check some bulbs regularly as harvest time approaches. Wipe the dirt from the bulb and if it is well developed and you can see the rough outlines of the cloves if it is ready to harvest. There is some danger in letting the bulbs remain in the ground too long as deterioration of the outer layers is a normal process. If the bulb is hyper mature, the wrappers may split open and the bulb will be more susceptible to mold and decay.

No two plants mature at the same time, so don't run the risk of checking a plant in one area and basing your harvest time on this plant alone. Slight differences in soil and sunlight can affect the maturation date. If you have a small crop and can harvest selectively, you may want to leave garlic with fewer dry leaves in a little longer.”

Harvest with a potato fork to loosen the soil staying back several inches from the plant base to avoid stabbing the bulb, then brush the loose dirt off the bulb.

### **Drying Garlic**

Don't leave your garlic in the sun longer than necessary. After it is pulled it should be hung in a well-ventilated shady area or shed. We normally tie bundles of 10. The fresh garlic can be used immediately, while garlic for storing should cure 2-3 weeks before you are ready to clean.

### **Cleaning Garlic**

- Use kitchen shears to cut the roots close to the bulb. Cut the stalk, leaving 1-4” of stalk on the bulb to prevent excessive drying. If you plan to braid the garlic, omit this step.
- Use an old toothbrush or soft nail brush to brush off any residual dirt from the root base. (A denture brush works best. I traded one from my dental hygienist for promised future garlic.)
- Use the brush to remove loose and dirty skins by pushing the bristles tip first into the edge of the skin break. You want to leave as many intact skins as possible to prolong storage life.
- Sort out your largest bulbs and set them aside for planting stock in excess of what you need. Figure on 8 planting cloves per bulb. I generally select 20% more than I need in case some show later signs of disease. After selecting the planting stock, put the remainder into the storage stock.
- Injured bulbs or those with incomplete wrappers don't have as much long-term storage potential. We eat and give away the bulbs with cracked wrappers as our "Eat First" stock. Diseases bulbs with defects or soft spots generally have some good cloves. Break them apart and store the cloves, refrigerating those whose clove wrapper is peeled off.
- With good tight skins, we find that our softneck garlic can last up to 6-12 months, right up to the next harvest. We have never run out of garlic.

### **Buying planting garlic**

The variety we plant mostly is Inchelium Red. A pound of which typically runs \$18-\$22, and most sellers offer 1/3 or 1/2 lb. orders. A pound is generally 4-5 bulbs and will yield approximately 50-90 cloves. Figure on planting the largest 8-9 cloves from each bulb and eating the smaller ones.

**Warning: Look carefully at the price per amount.** Some sites give a price for a bulb, 1/3 or 1/2 pound and two offered \$7.95 but didn't specify that this is per bulb! Prices as of August 25, 2014:

- Filaree Farms \$18.50/lb (We buy their garlic)
- Local Harvest (organic) \$18.50/lb.
- Baker Creek \$22/lb.
- Southern Exposure \$24/lb.
- Burpee \$32/lb.
- Park Seed \$38/lb
- Harry Fields \$7.99/bulb = \$32-40/lb.

[Growing Great Garlic](#) by Ronald Engeland. While advertised as a guide for organic gardeners and growing in Washington State, it has lessons for those who are less pure and discusses alternate opinions with an open mind.

A good simple website on growing garlic is at <http://www.finegardening.com/grow-your-own-garlic>.