



Oh the joys of garlic! So good for us and yet, it tastes good too. Although native to central Asia, garlic is another of those plants that has been cultivated for thousands of years in many cultures around the world. It is an easy plant to grow and take care – even though many gardeners think it cannot grow successfully this far north. Well, thank goodness we can definitely enjoy them in our northern gardens.

*Allium sativum* L (Garlic) is a member of *Allium* (onion) family and is broken into two main categories - *Allium sativum* var. *ophioscorodon* or hardneck and *Allium sativum* var. *sativum* – softneck. The differences are readily evident in the plant structure as they mature. Hardneck varieties produce a flower stalk (or scape) which will result in top grown bulbils. These bulbils can be used for production, but often (not always) production is better if those scapes are removed just above the last leaf, shortly after they begin to coil. Flower stalk production makes this category unusable for braiding – but that's really just an aesthetic issue. The types within the hardneck category include Rocambole, Purple Stripe, and Porcelain. Rocambole cloves, at maturity are roughly 2" – 2 1/2" in diameter, producing up to eleven cloves per bulb. This is a good cold weather choice that is reported, through taste testing, to have the best flavor of all the garlics. Some of the many cultivars to look for: Belgian Red, Carpathian, Czechland Race, Gigantus, Iowa, Russian Red, and Spanish Roja. Purple Stripe cloves mature to 1" – 1 1/2" across with anywhere from four to twelve cloves. This is an excellent garlic for baking as the cloves are large and meaty. Brown Rose, Chinese Red, Giant Siberian, Korean Red, Persian Star, Purple Glazer, Red Czar, and Siberian are some of the great cultivars found in Purple Stripe. Porcelain has similar growth characteristics to Purple Stripe with many great cultivars including Armenian, Blazer, Georgian Fire, German Extra Hardy, Leningrad, Music Pink, Polish Hardneck, Rosewood, and Zemo.

*Allium sativum* var. *sativum* or softneck garlic does not produce a flower stalk, requiring a bit less work during

the growing season as well as making them braid-able. When cured and stored properly, these have a longer storage life than hardneck category. The types within this category include Artichoke and Silverskin and are excellent producers for our area. Artichoke bulbs reach about 2 1/2" – 3" in diameter with up to 24 cloves per bulb. As one of the earliest garlic types to mature – it is perfect for us impatient gardeners. Look for California Early or Late, Himalayan Red, Lotus, Polish White, Purple Cauldron, Sicilian Artichoke, and Transylvanian cultivars. Silverskin types top out at 1 1/2" – 2" in bulb diameter and are the latest to mature. Try Idaho Silver, Nootka Rose, Silver Rose or White, and St. Helens for a good burst of flavor.

Often you see Elephant garlic (*Allium ampeloprasum*) listed as garlic. It is not really a true but a type of leek. But don't hold our inability to correctly name the poor thing – give a try. Growing requirements and conditions will be similar and if eaten shortly after harvest – the taste is quite close to true garlic.

When looking at garlic and trying to figure out what to do and when to do it – think about tulips. The requirements are similar. Garlic is a bulb and needs to be planted in the fall after a frost but before hard freeze. Late September or early October is usually good for northern areas. This will allow the bulbs time to get situated and develop some roots for good growth in the following spring and summer. So how many to plant...like everything else it depends on how much you are going to use, how much space is available and how possessed you are as a gardener. When ordering seed garlic, expect to get about 50 - 70 cloves per pound. Figure the finished production on one pound of planted garlic to be between four and eight pounds. And please – enhance your gardening experience by ordering good, high quality seed garlic bulbs. Don't use store bought garlic – the types and/or cultivars are probably not going to be hardy for this area. The size and quality you start with are a large part of what will determine the end product. After receiving the seed bulbs, they will need to be separated into cloves prior to

planting. Don't do this as soon as you get them unless you are planting that day. Separation should not be done more than a day before you are going to plant. If done earlier, they will dry out, you will lose viability and end production will be lower. Use the largest cloves for fall planting for the biggest bulbs for harvest. Smaller cloves can be held over for spring planting if you want to try some spring garlic – treat it just like you would spring onions. When planning for planting space allow about two feet between rows, with spacing between cloves no more than about six inches. This seems like a close spacing but they do very well in that situation. Once you have determined how much space is needed for the garlic bed, you are ready to prepare the area. Beds should be located in a nice loose and well-drained, high organic matter soil – optimal pH is between 6 and 7. After removing all vegetation (garlic does not do well when it has to compete with weeds or other plants) till or loosen the soil to a depth of about twelve inches. Plant the individual cloves about 2" under the surface of the soil with the pointed end up, flat root area (basal plate) down. Some of the larger cultivars may recommend deeper planting – check with the supplier. Nutrition for garlic is important and although it is a heavy nitrogen feeder, application timing is crucial. A good balanced fertilizer should be applied in late spring when top growth reaches 4"- 6" in height. Don't bother with earlier application as that will just interrupt early bulb development. After planting, cover with lots of mulch to prevent severe winter damage. Most cultivars will take a bit of cold, but they will all winter best with a layer of mulch that is several inches thick. (This should be removed in the spring after danger of hard freeze has passed.) Water the cloves in well to encourage root growth and continue to provide adequate water until July when the necks begin to dry.

Garlic is ready to harvest when the lower third of the leaves are brown and drying and the tops are still green. Leaving them in the ground past this point will actually cause them to begin to decline in quality. They will not increase in size once the lower leaves begin to brown. Be sure to dig them up with the plant intact – pulling them will only cause breakage. There are two ways to handle the garlic bulbs after harvest. One is to gently wash them immediately after removal from the ground and allow them to begin drying. The other is to leave all of the dirt intact, brushing

any remaining soil off after they are completely dry. You choose the technique that makes you happiest - either way is acceptable. Dry harvested bulbs by hanging them in a well-ventilated area at about 70 – 75 degrees Fahrenheit for two to three weeks. This curing will insure a long storage life for your beautiful and delicious bulbs. After curing – they can be braided for storage or the tops can be cut to about ½" – 1" above bulb and the roots should be trimmed close to base. Long term storage is possible if temperatures and humidity levels are appropriate – between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit and 50 – 60% humidity.

Garlic is often called the "Stinking Rose" - but what a grand smell it is!