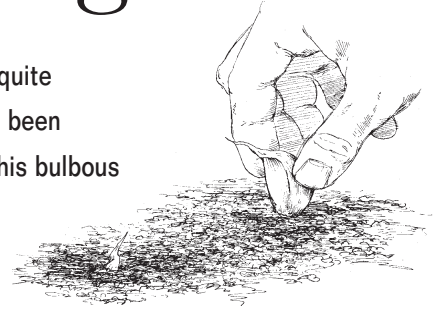


Growing & Harvesting Garlic

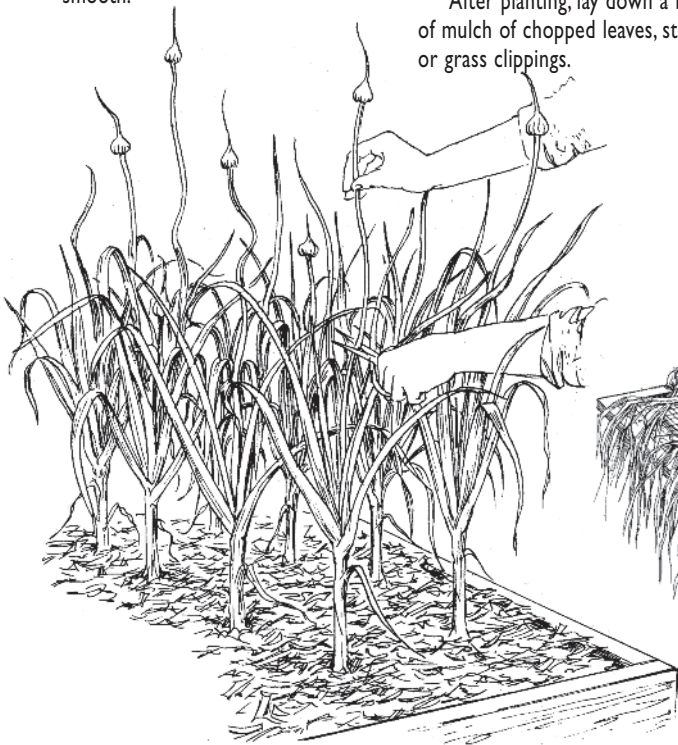
Garlic grown in your own garden and properly stored has a fresh pungency quite unlike the musty odor and bitter flavor too often present in cloves that have been sitting on a grocery shelf. Fortunately for those who enjoy cooking with it, this bulbous herb is easy to grow and requires very little space in the garden.



1 preparing the planting bed

It's wise to plant garlic in a spot not recently used for garlic or other plants in the onion family. Rotating crops prevents the buildup of disease organisms in the soil.

Garlic requires a reasonably fertile, well-drained soil. Avoid planting in areas where water can collect around the roots, causing them to rot or become diseased. Planting in a raised bed works well. Gophers are fond of garlic, so planting in raised beds lined with chicken wire is a good idea. Work in several inches of compost or well-rotted manure plus an organic vegetable mix. Then rake smooth.



2 plant & mulch

Garlic reproduces vegetatively that is, it multiplies from individual cloves broken off from a whole bulb. Each clove multiplies in the ground, forming a new bulb that consists of 10 to 20 cloves. Break a clove apart into individual cloves, keeping only the largest, firmest ones for planting. Space the cloves four to six inches apart and allow about a foot between rows. Set the cloves in with the pointed end up and the flat, basal plate down. Push each one an inch or so into the ground, firm the soil around it, and water the bed if it is dry.

After planting, lay down a layer of mulch of chopped leaves, straw or grass clippings.

3 spring care

When the leaves begin to grow in earnest it's important to feed the plants again to encourage robust growth.

Apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer that decomposes slowly, such as blood meal, gently working a teaspoon or two into the soil near each plant. Pull any weeds as they appear as they will rob moisture and nutrients from the garlic. And be sure to keep the garlic patch watered during dry spells.

In late spring some varieties send up flower stalks that will eventually produce small bulbils. Cut these stalks off to help direct the plant's energy into forming a large bulb.

As the summer solstice approaches, garlic plants stop producing new leaves and begin to form bulbs. Remove any remaining mulch and stop watering. Allowing the soil to dry out around the maturing bulbs will help the garlic store better.



4 harvest and storage

When most of the leaves have turned brown (in mid-July to early August, depending on your climate), gently pull or dig up the bulbs, being careful not to bruise them. Don't leave them in the ground too long, or they may begin to separate and will not store well.

Now lay the plant, leaves and all, out to dry for two or three weeks in a shady spot with good air circulation. An old window screen on sawhorses under a tree works well. Bring plants in if rain threatens. When the roots feel dry and brittle, rub them off, along with any loose dirt. Don't wash the bulbs or break them apart, though, or the plants won't last as long.

Either braid the garlic, tie it in bunches, or cut off the stems a few inches above the bulbs. Hand the braids, or store the loose bulbs on slatted shelves or screens in a cool airy location. Set aside the largest bulbs to replant later in the fall.

