

How to grow Garlic

Garlic is a vegetable, closely related to the onion and the leek. It has an intense flavour used widely in cooking, also favoured for its medicinal properties, and of course, for warding off vampires!

Garlic is a relatively easy crop to grow but does need a fertile, well drained soil. It does however, do well in a container. This activity sheet focuses on growing garlic if you have soil that tends to waterlog in winter.

This way is a great means of engaging those physically less able in a table top gardening activity, and as the cloves (part to be planted) are not too fiddly to handle, useful for those with poorer dexterity.

Garlic needs a cold spell for successful growth, so Autumn/Winter planting is recommended for a bountiful harvest around the following June. A meaningful winter task with anticipation for the warmer months ahead. If planting late winter, sow into cell trays and start off in a cold frame /sheltered spot to catch up.



The ingredients

What you will need:

- **Garlic Bulbs (you can use a leftover fridge bulb but for guaranteed results, use prepared garden centre/ nursery bought)**
- **A pot with good drainage holes**
- **Good quality compost with added nutrients**
- **Grit/drainage gravel**
- **Label and pen**
- **Watering can**



Step 1 Breaking open the bulb

Step 1 Break garlic bulbs into individual cloves. Only plant the larger ones, keeping any small ones for use in tonight's dinner.

Break up any lumpy bits of compost, and mix in grit for extra drainage (ratio 3:1, compost: grit).

Step 2 Fill pot and/or cell trays with compost, packing the compost by tapping sides of pot or knocking bottom of cells onto worktop, to remove any excess air holes.



Step 2 Filling with compost

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Each individual clove has a pointy upright end and a flat 'plate' end. The clove is inserted, plate end first, into the compost until the whole clove is about 2cm deep. Cover it over with compost.

Step 3 If short of space, sow individual cloves into cell trays which take less space to overwinter. This limited growing space will be outgrown by early March which should tie in with kinder weather conditions to plant the young plants directly into well dug-over soil, outdoors.

However, if wet conditions are the norm, sow 3 cloves evenly spaced into a pot (minimum depth and diameter of 15cm) or 6 cloves into a min 30cm dia pot. This will ensure the cloves will develop fully in the pot until harvesting, without any further handling.



Flat plated end of a garlic clove



Step 3 Individual cloves into cells



Step 3 Cloves into a larger pot



Step 4 Sheltered spot for overwintering

Step 4 Place pots /cells somewhere sheltered from excess rainfall, preferably south facing. Garlic fares well in cold climates; but not in exorbitantly wet ones!

Label the pots, and give a shower of water to settle compost.

N.B. Over watering can cause the cloves/bulbs to rot.

Step 5 Late Autumn/early Winter sown garlic will be ready for harvesting by mid Summer. The yellowing foliage is a sign that the cloves are fully matured into bulbs.

Use a trowel to lever the bulbs out of the compost/soil and leave to dry (cure) naturally for a few days before storing at 5-10C until ready to use.

Top tips

'Hardneck' and 'softneck' varieties of garlic are available. Softneck is reputed easier to grow and stores well, whilst hardneck is considered to be more flavoursome.

Birds can pull out the newly planted cloves—cover with a fine mesh or fleece to deter them.



Step 5 Freshly harvested bulbs 'curing'