



Fall is the Perfect Time to Plant Garlic

With the turning leaves and cooling temperatures, it's quite apparent that fall is here! And while our focus is turning away from our landscape or garden, now is the best time to get back outside and plant garlic for a next spring harvest.

Garlic is a very easy crop to grow in Nebraska, and is really something to add to your vegetable planting rotation. The input is quite minimal compared to the crop you can harvest. Most of us are most familiar with the bulb, which can be eaten raw (not recommended if talking to others is in your immediate future!), sautéed, roasted, or any other method you can think of. If garlic is harvested early, or while the bulb is still immature, you can use the bulb and/or stems much like you would scallions. Immature flowers, called scapes, from certain types of garlic (hardneck) are enjoying a surge in popularity because of their mild garlic flavor when used in stir fries, or similarly prepared dishes. Removing the flowers also helps the plant develop a larger bulb.

There are basically two types of garlic – hardneck, and softneck. Hardneck varieties, such as Rocambole, Porcelian, and Purple Stripe, produces a hard, woody flower stalk, and usually have a large-sized bulb, with fewer cloves. Hardneck varieties produce best when planted in the fall. Softneck garlic, such as Artichoke and Silverskin, have soft and flexible stems and leaves, and produce well if planted in fall or spring. Their bulbs are usually slightly smaller with more individual cloves. You may have heard of a third group, Elephant Garlic. This is actually not true garlic, but rather a type of leek that forms an underground bulb similar to garlic.

To grow garlic, the ideal conditions are much like those as onions. Well drained soil and sunlight are your two best friends. If you have heavy clay, or sandy soil, feel free to mix in some organic matter before planting. Doing this to either soil helps with drainage, and nutrient transportation. Keep in mind Garlic bulbs have very short, shallow roots, so the closer their needs are to them, the better the crop will be.

When planting garlic, place one garlic clove every 4-5" apart, and bury them (tip up like a tulip bulb) 2-3" below the surface. October is the best time to plant garlic, because the plants need at least a month of cold temperatures to induce bulb production. When you plant them this fall, they will grow for a little bit, establish roots, and then go dormant through the cold weather. Fall planted garlic would be ready to harvest in mid- June to early July.

When harvest time rolls around, you will know your garlic is ready when the lower one third of the leaves turn yellow. After digging the plants up, the bulbs need 2-4 weeks of curing at 75-90 degree temperatures and low humidity to properly dry and ready the bulbs for storage.

Natalia Bjorklund is an Extension Educator here in Dodge County. If you have any questions regarding your lawn and gardens, you can visit her at the Extension office at 1206 W. 23rd here in Fremont, or call or email her at 402.727.2775, and natalia.bjorklund@unl.edu