Growing Garlic

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Plant Garlic after the First Frost in Fall

Although in the south they can plant garlic in early spring, we normally plant it in the fall after the first frost. We do this so that the bulbs have enough time to develop roots but cold enough that the shoots do not break the surface. Garlic likes even moisture and not too wet.

Just before planting, crack the bulbs apart into separate cloves, keeping a bit of the basal plate intact. Use only the largest cloves so they will have a chance to form reasonable sized bulbs by harvest. Plant into double rows or even 4 to 6 across and about 8 inches apart. Make sure the pointy end is up about 2 inches below the surface and mulch with about 4 inches of chopped leaves.

Harvest When the Tops Die

Harvest the cloves next year when the garlic tops lose their green colour. With a fork gently lift them from the ground and dry them outdoors for a couple of days if it is dry, under cover if it is wet. You are looking for a well wrapped bulb with the skins intact for good storage.

Varieties to Plant

You can try the ones from the grocery store if they look healthy and plump, but you might find that they were a variety more suited to another climate and to commercial production than to the home garden in our area. There are a number of varieties you could try. Vesey's sells sets of a hard neck variety called 'Music'. Elephant garlic is grown the same way, has a milder flavour, but does not store well.

Problems you Might Encounter

Garlic is usually disease and pest free but can get a few fungal diseases. If you encounter problems make sure that your soil drains freely and that you rotate your crops.

Storage

Hang the cloves in a mesh bag so that they get good air circulation. You can save your largest bulbs for planting next year.

Learn more about growing garlic from the Cornell University site www.gardening.cornell.edu >

Learn more about garlic on Wikipedia >