

Finally Fall: Growing Garlic in NJ

Eating Locally & Seasonally

Did you ever think about where your food comes from? Chances are that a lot of the food you eat travels thousands of miles before it even makes it onto your plate! Avocados are grown in Mexico, citrus fruits like oranges are grown in California, and potatoes are grown in Idaho. If you are eating fresh food in the middle of the winter, it is probably coming from even farther away places like Israel or Peru! Imagine how much fossil fuel it requires for a full meal to make it onto your plate. *What can YOU do to make sure your meals require a little less energy?*



Farmers markets are a great way to get fresh, local fruits and vegetables. Not only is this food grown right in your own community, but it was likely picked only a day, or even a few hours, before you purchase it! Talk about **FRESH!** Eating food so soon after it was picked means it doesn't need to be sprayed with chemicals to prevent it from going bad and it also means it has more nutrition in it.

If you can believe it, there is a way to get food **FRESHER & MORE LOCAL** than from a farmers' market. Can you guess what that is? It is growing your **OWN** garden! You only need a small patch of soil or even a pot to start growing your own food. Here in NJ, many gardeners love to grow tomatoes, peppers and basil. However, there is an easy crop you can grow here that many people forget about. It actually gets planted in the **FALL** and picked the following summer. That crop is **GARLIC!!** You can grow a whole lot of garlic and it will last the whole year so it's basically always in season.

Garlic: Healthy & Tasty!

Scientists believe garlic was discovered in the Middle East about 5,000 years ago and it spread widely across Asia, Europe, and eventually to the New World. Garlic was originally used as a medicine! Whenever there was an outbreak of a disease, such as tuberculosis, cholera and influenza, people used garlic to heal themselves. They believed garlic had wide benefits such as curing skin disease, relieving constipation, reducing fever, and adding vitamins to diets. During the Spanish flu in 1917, the last pandemic before the Coronavirus, people wore a necklace of garlic when going out in public to repel the germs. *Maybe we should all try that now?*



A lot of the medicine hundreds and thousands of years ago was trial and error. But scientists today have proven that garlic is extremely healthy for us and can help prevent or shorten illnesses, such as the common cold. They are even studying whether garlic can be used in preventing and maybe even curing cancer! We also know that garlic is a healthy addition to our diets because it gives us several different kinds of vitamins and minerals.

Maybe the saying should be, “Some garlic each day keeps the doctor away!” What do you think?

How Do We Eat Garlic?

Garlic can be included in many different recipes! You can chop it and add it to cooked dishes such as soup, stir fry, stuffing, and quiche. Cooking garlic makes the flavor mellow and pleasant. People use raw garlic in pesto but since it’s not usually cooked, a little goes a long way. For a healthy kick, some people even add it to their smoothies but be prepared - it has a strong smell and a spicy flavor when raw!

Fun Facts About Garlic

- ❖ Garlic is in the **allium** family. Allium means onion. Can you name some other foods that you think are in the Allium family?
- ❖ Garlic is a root crop which means that the part that we eat grows underground. Can you name some other foods that are also roots crops?
- ❖ Garlic is a unique crop in the garden because you actually don’t put a seed or a plant in the ground. You plant a “clove”!

Activity: What is a Clove?

- Ask a grown up if you have a “head” of garlic in the house. (If not, try to find one at the supermarket!)
- The garlic “head” can be broken up into several small “cloves”. The cloves look kind of like half -moons and usually there are somewhere between 6 -12 cloves in each head.
- With permission, try to separate the garlic head into the cloves and see how many there are.
- Take a closer look at one of the cloves. This is what you plant in your garden that will grow into a brand -new head of garlic!
- There should be a flat, rough end and a pointy end. The flat, rough end is where the roots will grow out and into the soil. The pointy end is where the stem will emerge. Can you guess which end should point down when you plant the garlic? If you said the flat, rough end you’re correct!
- 1 single garlic clove will grow into a whole head of garlic! The head grows underground (because it’s a root crop) and stems and leaves (that you don’t eat) will grow aboveground.



Kinds of Garlic You Can Plant

There are 2 main types of garlic: “hard neck” and “soft neck”. When you look at the pointy side of an entire garlic head, you might see a stiff stem poking out - that is the hard neck! If it’s not there, then you have a soft neck garlic. (Maybe they should just be called “no neck”...) The garlic you get at the supermarket is usually “soft neck” but the ones from farmers’ markets are usually “hard neck”. See if you can find examples of both!

You can plant either type of garlic. However, it's probably a good idea to use organic garlic because if it's not organic, it might have been sprayed with a chemical to prevent it from sprouting. We need it to sprout in order to grow in our gardens!

Activity: Paper Towel Germination

In this experiment, you can check and see if the garlic you have will actually form roots and a sprout.

- Ask for permission to do an experiment on one or two cloves of garlic.
- Dampen a paper towel and lay the cloves on it. Fold over the paper towel so the cloves are covered all the way around.
- Place the damp paper towel in a plastic bag and leave it in a warm spot in your kitchen.
- Check on the cloves every few days and sketch what you see.

Planting the Garlic

You plant the cloves in the fall before it gets too cold out. If you have a garden with nice, healthy soil, you can use that. If you don't, you can get a flowerpot and fill it with healthy soil. Following is instructions on how you plant garlic. You can also watch this [video](#) to see the planting in action!

1. First you have to get an organic garlic head and break it up into all its cloves. Leave the papery skin on the cloves as this will protect them while they are in the ground. L
2. Lay out your cloves on the surface of the soil so that they are about 6 inches apart in each direction.
3. Lift up each clove one at a time, poke your finger about 3 inches into soil.
4. Push the clove into the hole you made. Make sure the root side (flat & rough) is facing down and the stem side (pointy) is facing up.
5. Cover the clove with soil and pat down.
6. Now move onto the next clove!
7. Once all the garlic are planted, you can give them a bit of water, so the soil is damp but not sopping wet.
8. Garlic like to be protected in the cold weather so covering them with some leaves or straw will help keep them nice and snug.

And there you have it - a **garlic garden!** The tiny leaves will start growing in the fall but then they will sit quietly in the cold and snow. You might think the plants died but once the spring comes, they will come right back to life! The leaves will sprout up and quickly turn into tall, slender stems. They will grow to about 18 inches tall by May. Make sure the ground stays damp but not too wet. If it rains, you don't need to water until it gets a bit dry.

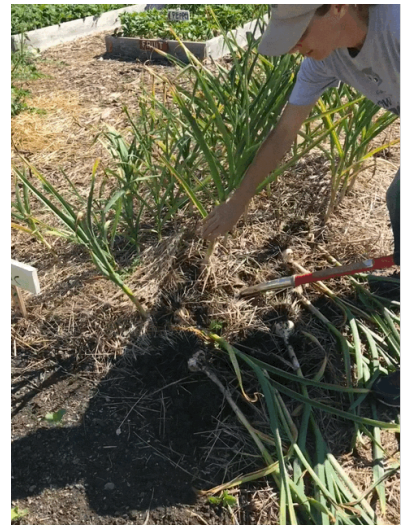




Harvesting the Garlic

“Harvest” means “gathering crops”. You can harvest tomatoes all summer long because they keep growing but you harvest all your garlic on the same day! In our growing zone in central NJ, garlic is harvested anywhere from the last week of June through the 1st week of July. It’s important to pull the garlic at the right time because if you pull too early, the garlic heads will not be fully formed. If you wait too long, the head will start to split open and they will go bad more quickly. Here are some things to look for:

1. If you planted “hard neck garlic”, the first thing you will harvest is the “garlic scape”. A garlic scape is a long flower stalk that shoots up from the center of the garlic stalk and has a small flower bud at the tip. When these scapes start to curve and make a full circle, you cut them at their base. They are delicious in stir fries and add a mild garlic flavor to any dish. You can even make a pesto out of the scapes! About 2 -3 weeks after you harvest the scapes, it will be time to harvest your full garlic. Soft neck garlic does not grow a scape so you can skip this step if that’s what you planted.
2. Your garlic will be ready to harvest in late June or early July. You will know it’s ready when the tops of the plant begin to yellow and fall over and the bottom leaves turn brown and dry. Once the plant looks like it’s about half brown and dead, you can tell that the garlic is not growing anymore and it’s time to HARVEST!
3. Pick a dry day to pull your garlic. The dryer the heads are, the longer they will last without rotting. Carefully lift them from the ground. If they are stuck in the ground, you can use a garden tool to help get them out but be careful not to damage them. Brush off the dirt - do NOT wash!! Do not trim the stems or roots!! You can leave them in the sun to dry for a day and then brush off more of the dirt.



Curing the Garlic

You can eat the garlic fresh right after you pull it or you can **CURE** the garlic. “Cure” is just a fancy word for letting it get really, really dry so that it lasts a long time. Make sure your curing spot is out of direct sunlight. Garages and barns work great. Lay out all the garlic plants with the stems and roots still attached and with any remaining dirt still on them. You can lay them on a table or screen or hang them. Just make sure they are not too bunched up. If you have a fan, you can use that to help make sure your cloves are getting as dry as possible.





After 2 -4 weeks, your cloves will be fully dried. You will see the skin of the bulb has turned dry and papery on the outside. The stem and roots should be fully dried and brown. You can trim the stems and roots so you have a nice neat garlic bulb that looks just like the ones from the store! You can store them in a cool, dry spot for many months or until you eat them all. Yum.

Your Turn!

Now is your chance to try and plant your own garlic! You can use organic garlic from the supermarket or farmers’ market. Follow the instructions and pictures above. Below is a sample “growing journal” where you can keep track of what’s happening with your garlic. You can use ours or make your own! Be sure to draw or take pictures and label them with the date.

Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Description: Picture of the garlic head & cloves	Description: Planting day!	Description:	Description:	Description:
Picture:				

Let’s Get Cooking!

Whether you grow your own garlic, or you buy it from a store or a farm, you should definitely try it in some recipes since it is so healthy for you! Here are some recipes ideas for you and your family to try!



Garlic Scapes: [Sugar Snap Pea & Garlic Scape Pesto](#)

Sautéed Garlic: Peel and mince 1 -4 cloves of garlic - decide how much garlic flavor you want! Chop up your favorite veggies such as bell peppers, broccoli and carrots. Add some oil to a pan and turn the stove



on medium heat. Add the garlic and the veggies and stir while cooking until they are crisp tender. Enjoy on their own or over rice!

Variations: Add sliced chicken; create a sauce to go with your stir -fry; add in a can of baby corn for some fun!

Raw Garlic: [Avocado -Cucumber -Garlic smoothie](#)

Roasting a Whole Head: [Roasting the whole head turn the garlic soft and sweet and it can be used as a delicious spread on fresh bread](#)

Source: [Extracts from the history and medical properties of garlic](#)