
HORTICULTURE NEWS

Garlic, healthy for you and easy to grow

Jason Graves, Central Kansas District Horticulture Agent

Everyone knows about garlic. It is used extensively in cooking, and is also a big health boosting/medicinal food, providing many benefits for the body. Regardless of how you use garlic, it is easy to grow and anyone can have success growing this relatively care free crop.

Fall planting

We usually don't think about planting too many garden crops in the fall, but garlic is an exception to the rule. Garlic can be thought of as a sort of spring bulb. Spring bulbs are planted in the fall and the planting time for garlic is now.

Garlic bulbs can be purchased online or from garden stores which is preferred, but in a pinch you can even go to the grocery store and buy bulbs from the vegetable section to plant.

How to plant

Garlic prefers a fairly well drained and loose soil and will do well in a typical garden or raised bed. Fall is also a good time to work compost into the garden soil, so incorporating compost before planting may be helpful in poorer soils. Garlic is a heavy feeder, so apply 3 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet and mix into the soil before planting or fertilize according to a soil test.

To plant garlic, pull the skin off the large bulb and take the individual garlic cloves apart (the bulb is made up of smaller parts called cloves). Choose the largest cloves to plant as these will grow into larger bulbs next spring. Dig down into the soil about 2 inches and put a clove point up in each hole. Cover the clove with soil and then tamp it down. Cloves can be planted about every 6 inches and rows should be spaced 18 inches apart.

After planting, water the cloves well and place several inches of straw or shredded leaves on top of the rows to help insulate and protect the cloves over the winter.

Spring care

You may not see growth until next spring. In the meantime, keep track of where the cloves are planted. It may help to place small markers near them or at least on each row of garlic so you don't plant something else over the top next spring.

Garlic requires one inch of water per week in spring. Irrigate weekly during dry weather. Winter mulch may need to be pulled back from the cloves as they start to grow but since garlic is a poor competitor with weeds, weeding the bed or leaving mulch between rows to prevent weeds will help it thrive.

Garlic is ready to harvest in the summer when the tops have grown and start to fade and bend over. Test dig when the lower 1/3 of the foliage is yellow. If the cloves have segmented, it is time to harvest. If they haven't segmented, wait another week or two. After digging, put them in a cool, dry, and shady area to let them harden and the skin cure. Then take them inside and store them in a cool, dry place. Garlic can last up to 6 months if stored properly

You can save some of the bulbs for planting next fall. After you've grown your first crop, you'll have enough to keep planting for many years to come.