

Garlic Planting

In my home there are two types of people—those who love garlic and those who are wrong. Garlic is a great addition to every meal from scrambled eggs to any pasta, casserole, soup or meat. For my fellow garlic enthusiasts, the autumn season is garlic planting season. Unlike some crops, garlic must be planted in the fall, not the spring, to produce a crop. Early October to early November is the ideal time to get garlic in the ground and begin the countdown to more flavorful meals!

As with most vegetable production, you'll want to till or work the garden soil. Before planting, amend soil in accordance with a soil test (<https://www.shawnee.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/soil-testing.html>) and add organic matter, like compost, if you have heavily clay soils as garlic prefer loose soils to make emergence and root growth easier.

Break the garlic bulbs into individual cloves while trying to preserve as much as the papery layer as possible. This layer helps to protect the cloves from disease and insect pests. Cloves should be planted about 3 inches apart at a depth of 1-2 inches. The cloves should be planted with the pointed end up, although they will usually right themselves if planted upside down—it just takes more energy. Make sure to clearly mark your garlic row so that it remains undisturbed in the spring when you begin to plant other vegetable crops nearby. For those who prefer a milder taste, shallots can be treated the same as garlic for planting.

Gently press the soil around each clove to help keep it in place and water each clove thoroughly. Keep cloves moist, but not waterlogged until first frost. In the fall, you may see garlic emerge and grow before the temperatures drop. Don't rely on seeing the shoots as a sign of a successful planting. Garlic may develop roots in the fall and never send up foliage. In the spring, garlic will grow much more vigorously. In early to mid-June, garlic will be ready to harvest.

After garlic tops begin to brown and drop over, you'll know they're ready to harvest. Pull the entire plant and put them in a cool dry area to harden. After about a week, bring the bulbs indoors and store in a dry area out of direct sunlight.

When selecting garlic to grow, there are many types to choose from. Different varieties have slightly different flavors, bulb size and harvest timing. Often garlic is divided into hardneck and softneck. Hardneck garlic has a solid central stem whereas softneck garlic produce only leaves. Hardneck varieties are more winter hardy with a wider variety of flavors.

A common question with garlic is can you take what you buy from the store and plant it in your garden. Most likely no, due to the garlic's origins. We import most garlic from California. Those varieties are not as cold hardy and may not survive Kansas winters. As with other vegetables and plants, it's always best to visit your local garden center and purchase bulbs adapted to our area.