



Make History! Plant Garlic!

By Marie Woodward, Uconn Home & Garden Education Center

One of the most delicious, healthful, and historic foods you can grow with ease is being planted in Connecticut right now — delicious, aromatic garlic.

Garlic has been in culinary and medicinal use for millenia. Egyptian and Indian cultures were enjoying garlic 5000 years ago; Chinese cultures 2000 years ago. Its popularity migrated across Asia and Europe, and today, garlic is revered in cuisines around the world. Garlic has both a unique aroma and a distinctive taste. It's hard to imagine a better perfume than garlic sautéed in butter, or a more savory appetizer than a roasted whole garlic spread on a crostini.



Garlic drying. Photo by Marie Woodward, 2021

When it comes to growing garlic, the news is all good. Garlic is one of the easiest crops to grow successfully. Pests don't seem to like garlic, so rabbits, groundhogs and squirrels leave it alone. It's not quite a 'plant-it-and-forget-it' crop, but it is one of the least demanding of all vegetables. Here are some guidelines to help assure harvest success.

Garlic comes in many varieties but only two types: hardneck or softneck garlic. Hardneck garlic has a larger bulb, and a sturdy central stalk (the hard neck) around which the garlic cloves grow.

Its flavor is more intense than softneck varieties, and it has a cold hardy nature. This makes hardneck garlics the best choice for Connecticut's chilly climate.



Trays of pungent garlic at the Garlic Farm. Photo by Marie Woodward, 2021

Gary Cirullo, owner of The Garlic Farm in West Granby (<http://thegarlicfarmct.com/>), has been growing garlic commercially since 1997. He offers this advice on how to grow great garlic crops in our region. Through experimentation with many different varieties, Gary has found German White garlic to be the best hardneck variety for his farm, but these suggestions apply to all hardneck garlics:

Start with Cloves Not Seeds - Planting garlic is best done in the fall, two or three weeks before the first hard freeze. (There's still time but get going.) Rather than being grown from seed, garlic comes from the cloves of a parent plant. A bulb of the parent garlic is divided, and each clove is planted pointed-side-up and root-side down (like a flower bulb) in furrows two inches deep, with cloves set four inches apart. The furrows are filled with soil to the surface, leveled, and watered in. Multiple furrows should be placed a foot apart.

Plant- Plant the largest cloves from the seed garlic as soon as you break up the bulb. (Think - "Big cloves - Big results!")

Sun - Garlic likes full sun, at least six hours a day

Site – Garlic thrives in rich, organic, well-drained soil, with a pH of 6.5 - 6.7. For disease protection, don't plant garlic where leeks, chives, or onions were recently planted.

Fertilizer- Cirullo recommends a low nitrogen fertilizer (5-4-8) when planting, to promote root growth.

Water – He also recommends watering at planting time to encourage root growth. Cease watering when the ground freezes, then resume watering 1inch per week in spring. Cease watering again when lower leaves start to turn brown.

Mulch- Mulch helps protect the cloves from rodents and moisture during winter, and limits weeds in spring and summer. A good mulch is light in weight. 4 inches of straw or shredded leaves make an ideal mulch. Cirullo recommends not mulching until the ground freezes to keep rodents from setting up house and munching on the roots during the winter.

Pruning Scapes- Hardneck garlic grows a flower stalk called a ‘scape’ in spring. It’s considered a bonus crop due to its mild garlic flavor. To keep the energy in the bulb, prune the scape to the first leaf. Scapes make great pesto, (for Gary’s famous scape recipe see Garlic Farm link).

Harvesting garlic - Connecticut garlic develops 10-14 leaves by Mid-June. When the garlic nears harvest, the bottom leaves brown and fall off the plant. When only four or five leaves are left the garlic is ready to be pulled. To confirm, pull the soil away for a section of the garlic and check for clove divisions.

Curing garlic Once pulled, garlic should be cured in an area out of the sun and with low humidity and good ventilation. This allows the wrappers surrounding the bulbs to tighten, extending the storage life of the bulbs. Trim the stalks for easier storage.

Making garlic history. Save the largest bulbs from your crop for seeding next fall. The miracle of planting cloves from a parent bulb is that you literally clone the parent plant year after year after year. It’s possible that the garlic you enjoy next fall has roots extending all the way back to India 5000 years ago. Delicious!

If you have questions about growing garlic or on any other horticultural topic, call the UCONN Home and Garden Education Center, toll-free, at 877.486.6271, visit their website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension Center.

