

## Barbara's Tips and Techniques For Successfully Growing Garlic



*The following is a synopsis of the growing garlic presentation made by Barbara Billek of Westside at the Fall, 2012, Columbia Gardeners Meeting.*

There is soft neck garlic and hard neck garlic. Hard neck garlic has larger cloves, is easier to peel and stores better. Sow garlic between October 15 and November 15. This gives the plant time to make good root development but not enough time for leaf growth. Soil PH should be between 6 and 7.

Prepare the soil: First add about 1-inch of compost. Then add 10-20-10 (about 2 cups per 20 square feet) because more phosphorus will grow better roots.

I make my own organic 10-20-10: 2 parts Blood Meal, 3 parts Bone Meal and 6 parts Greensand. Then I add Kelp meal about 1/2 cup per 20 square feet.

Planting the cloves: Large cloves will give large cloves. Save the small ones for cooking. Separate the cloves at the garden otherwise, if you do so ahead of time, the cloves will dry out.

Plant them pointy side up, 1 and 1/2 inches down and 5 - 6 inches apart all ways. Water the cloves in.

You should see growth in a few weeks and by late Fall growth should be 4 - 6 inches. In mid-December mulch with 4 - 6 inches of straw. This will keep the cloves from shifting due to the soil shifting because of changes in the temperature. Now, you can rest until Spring.

In early or mid-Spring, remove the mulch. Now, you want leaf growth so only fertilize with nitrogen. You can use Blood Meal or Fish Emulsion. Fertilize six times every two weeks: mid and late March, mid and late April and mid and late May.

Around the end of May hard neck garlic will produce a flower stalk called a scape. You want to cut this off otherwise all the energy will go into the scape. The scape will emerge straight, then curl, and then it will completely straighten. You want to cut it about 2 inches from where it emerges when the scape is curled and looks like a pig's tail.

Store the scapes in the refrigerator. Use as you would spring onions but cut off the flower head. Use in stir fry's, salads, you can even make garlic scape soup.

Water is critical during May and early June, then stop watering. Garlic does not like water a few weeks prior to harvesting.

Harvesting: When about half of the leaves are brown, it is time to harvest. Use a fork or shovel to lift the garlic and gently brush off most of the soil. You can use the garlic then but if you want to store it, you have to cure it.

Cure garlic by drying it in a well-ventilated area, out of direct sunlight, 70-80 degrees temperature. A fan is helpful. Lay them on a screen or bundle them and hang to dry for 3-4 weeks so all the green in the leaves is gone.

Trim the stem to about 1 1/2" - 2" and trim the roots to about 1/2 ". Brush off any remaining dirt but leave as much paper on the bulb as you can for protection.

Hang in mesh bags in a dry well-ventilated area. Do not store in the refrigerator as the cold temperature will tell the clove that it is time to grow and the garlic will sprout.

Save your biggest and best bulbs to use as seed in the Fall. Do this every year and you will get bigger cloves and you will never have to buy garlic again.