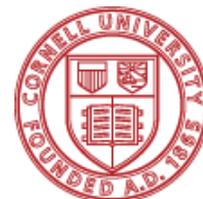




## Fall is for Garlic

By Sue Gwise, *Horticulture Educator*



If you've ever wanted to grow garlic, now is the time to plant. As strange as it seems, in northern New York, garlic should be planted after the first fall frost through early November. This odd planting time has to do with the growing preferences of garlic. It likes cool temperatures when developing foliage and warm temperatures when the bulbs enlarge. Garlic cloves planted in the fall will develop roots. Over the winter the cloves will be exposed to cold temperatures that will cause the bulb development. In the early spring, cool weather will cause the foliage to grow. In fact, garlic will be the first crop to appear in your garden after winter. As the weather warms, the bulbs will enlarge. Harvest begins in July as the leaves begin to die back.



*Garlic bulb with partial stalk*

Also known as the 'stinking rose', garlic is easy to grow. You will get the best production in full sun locations with fertile, well-drained soil that is slightly dry and enhanced with organic matter. The soil pH should be slightly acidic—6.2 to 6.8.

Garlic is planted by separating individual cloves from the larger garlic bulb. To ensure success, purchase bulbs from a seed catalog or a garden center source. Do not plant garlic that is purchased from a grocery store. They can carry disease and are often treated with substances that prevent sprouting.

Break the bulbs into individual cloves—do not remove the paper-like skins that cover the cloves. Plant the cloves 2 inches deep with the tips pointing up. In-row spacing is 4 to 6 inches and rows should be 20 inches apart. After planting, mulch the rows heavily to prevent soil heaving. In the spring, remove *most* of the mulch—leave some behind to suppress weeds.

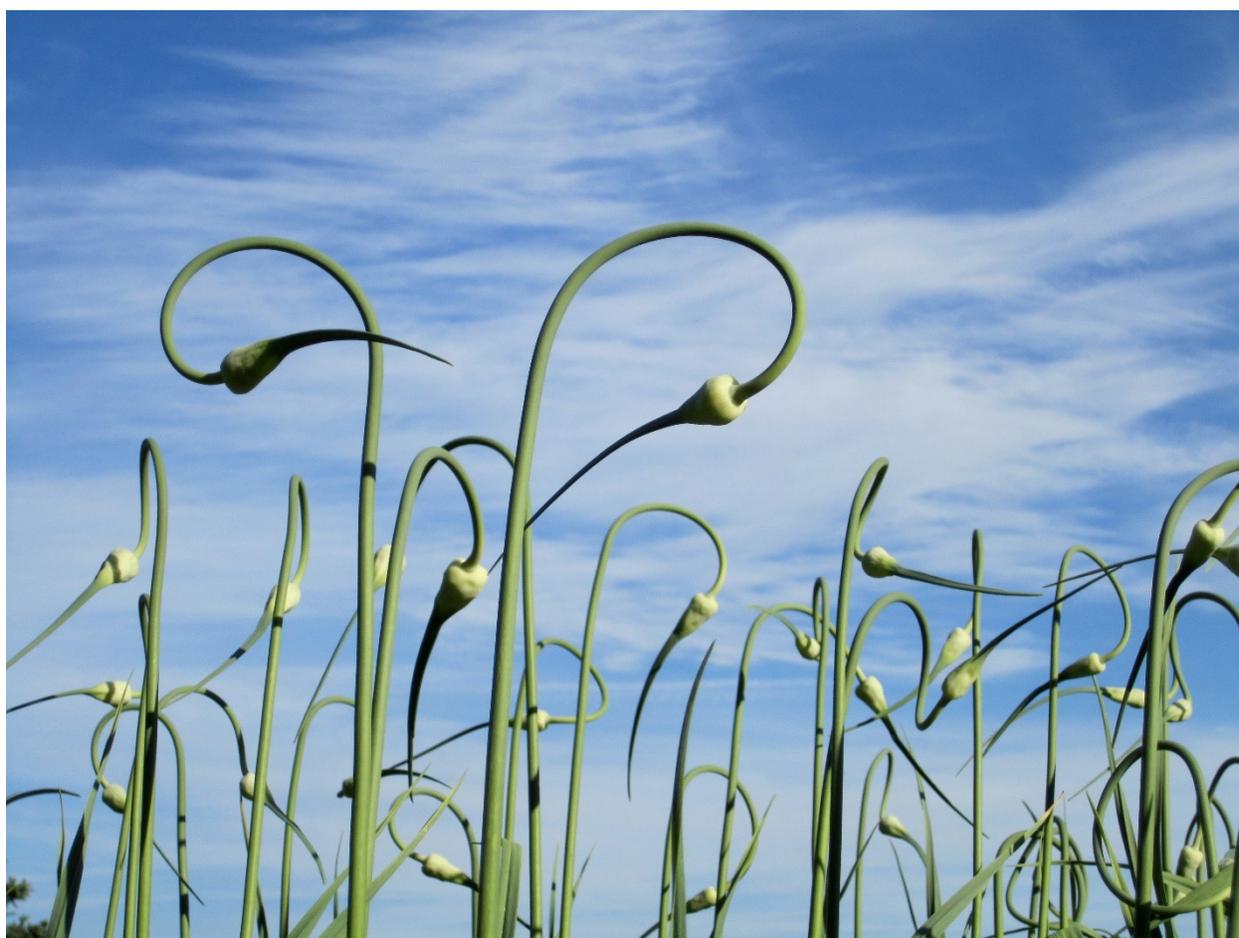
In early summer, the developing garlic plants will send up flower stalks, also known as 'scapes'. They have thick stems and will curl into loops as they grow. Scapes should be removed after they form one loop. This causes the plant to put its energy into bulb development rather than flower development. Removing the scapes will result in larger bulbs. Scapes are edible and one of the first vegetables that can be harvested from the garden. They have a mild garlic flavor—use them as you would use onions. Just make sure to sauté them first as they can be tough.

In mid-summer (July), the garlic leaves will begin to turn yellow and die back. When half of the leaves on an individual plant have turned yellow, harvest should begin. Check one of the bulbs by pulling it out and cutting it in half around its 'equator'. The individual cloves should be fully developed and tightly packed with no spaces. At that point, the plants can be harvested.

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Place the harvested plants in a shady area with good air circulation and allow them to cure until the leaves have withered. They can then be braided together, or you can simply cut the leaves off. Store the bulbs whole in a dark, cool and dry location. Do not rinse the bulbs before storage—this will increase the chance of decay. Most stored garlic bulbs will last through the winter if stored correctly.

There are three types of garlic that are offered in garden centers and through catalogs—softneck, stiffneck, and elephant. The stiffneck varieties are best suited for growth in northern New York due to their cold hardiness. They produce a single ring of large cloves around a stiff central stem. The type of garlic usually found in grocery stores is softneck garlic. It produces medium-sized cloves around the outside and small cloves on the inside. Overall, it produces more cloves, but I find the small cloves annoying and hard to process in the kitchen. Elephant garlic produces the largest cloves and is not as hardy. Beginners should stick with stiffneck varieties such as ‘Music’.



*Garlic scapes that have developed one 'loop'. (Smithsonian Magazine)*

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