

Weekly Ag & Natural Resources Column

OSU Extension Clinton County

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Planting Garlic in the Fall

Next week I am teaching a session for the Pike and Scioto County new Master Gardener Volunteers on garlic and herb production. With this topic in mind, I would like to share with you the process of garlic propagation during the fall. Whether you plan on having garlic around to keep the vampires at bay this Halloween, or for your culinary needs, garlic is great to have available.

Choosing a site

Garlic Thrives in well-drained soils with a pH of between 6.0 and 8.0. Soils that are poorly drained or highly compacted can promote disease and misshapen and small heads. Since garlic is planted in the fall, it can easily follow other vegetables grown during the summer. Garlic does not compete well with weeds, so a labeled herbicide or regular hand removal of perennial or winter annual weeds is a must. Garlic enjoys a loam type soil that is relatively loose, this allows for the head and cloves to grow.

Cultivar selection

Garlic comes in Hardneck or Softneck varieties. Hardneck garlic produces fewer but larger cloves. Hardneck cloves peel more easily than Softneck, but do not keep as well in storage as Softneck. We can further divide Hardneck garlic into a purple stripe, porcelain, or rocambole garlic. Rocambole garlic doesn't do as well in warmer climates, so it might not do as well in southern Ohio. Commonly planted Hardneck varieties in Ohio are 'Music', 'Georgian Fire', and 'Georgia Crystal'. Hardneck garlic will not flower like Softneck but will produce a small seed cluster called a "bulbil". Bulbil's can be used for propagation.

Softneck garlic produces smaller heads with more cloves compared to Hardneck, generally, you will see between 14 to 20 cloves depending on the variety. Between the two types of garlic, Softneck stores for longer periods of time.

Planting

Garlic Cloves can be planted 2 inches deep and placed 5 inches apart within the row. The Cloves will grow roots and shoots before they go dormant in the late season. Growth begins again in the spring and the bulbs will develop. Garlic can be harvested during mid-summer. Cloves should be planted in a furrow and firmly pressed into the ground, so they remain upright. Make sure to press the flat basal plate into the ground, with the pointed end facing upwards. The first leaves should emerge prior to a heavy frost in the fall.

Do not use store bought garlic for propagation, many kinds of garlic have been treated to prevent sprouting. Buy propagation stock or seed garlic cloves from local garden stores for planting. Garlic is propagated asexually (a clone of itself), so make sure to choose the healthiest looking bulbs for planting.

Winter annual weeds can be controlled by pre-emergent herbicides that are labeled for use in garlic. You can also mulch using straw to prevent weed pressure. When growth starts again in the spring, remove the mulch and either hand pull or use a systemic pre-emergent herbicide to control summer annuals. Make sure to follow every rule of the herbicide on the label, because the label is the law. Garlic will produce scapes (seed heads) in the late spring. Scapes can be harvested in the spring and used as a green onion or scallion. Removing the scape will also increase the size of the garlic bulb.

Fertilization

Garlic is a heavy feeder of nutrients, so proper fertilization is crucial in a successful garlic plot. Start off by getting a soil sample done to understand which nutrients you need to add to the soil. Typical fertilizer application rates for garlic are:

1 to 1.25 pounds of 19-19-19 per 100 sq/ft

1.5 to 2 pounds of 12-12-12 per 100 sq/ft

2 pounds of urea per 500 sq/ft (in situations where only Nitrogen is needed)

80 to 100 lbs. of Nitrogen per acre for large producers.

Harvest

Garlic is ready to harvest when the lower leaves begin to turn yellow. If you wait until the leaves are brown, the bulb will be rotten or missing paper. As bulbs mature, this may lead to splitting and a lower shelf life. Garlic is better to be dug out of the ground than pulled, pulling will damage the head or stem. Remove all soil from the bulb but do not wash with water. Set the heads out into the sun and allow them to dry for about a week.

Information used from OSU Extension publication HYG-1627 "Growing Garlic in the Garden."