

September 26, 2018



Get Ready to Grow Garlic!
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Garlic is a versatile addition to any home garden. Aside from all the delicious things you can make with garlic, growing garlic is a fun waiting game. You press the cloves into the soil in fall and leave them alone through most of the winter. In spring, see the tips of their leaves press through soil, erupting into alien-like seed spires and twisted scapes while the cloves neatly organize themselves into bulbs. Fall garlic planting is between September and November, ideally about two weeks before or after the first frost date.

There are two main types of garlic: hardneck and softneck. Hardneck garlic produces a stick-like seedstalk in the center of the head, and each bulb produces large, uniformly sized cloves. Softneck garlic produces supple stalks which are perfect for braiding. This type of garlic typically produces smaller cloves, with more cloves per head. Softneck garlic is the type of garlic preferred by commercial growers and is the garlic that we most commonly find in grocery stores. Fans of elephant garlic may be interested to know that it is not a true garlic, but rather a member of the leek family. However, the information for growing garlic is applicable to growing elephant garlic.

No matter what kind of garlic you choose to plant, use a high-quality seed that is certified free from nematodes and disease. You can find seed garlic from some of the local nurseries, and from suppliers online. If you are tempted to plant garlic that you purchased from the grocery store, note that it may not be disease resistant or of the highest growing quality. Also keep in mind that the size of the cloves planted directly relate to the size of the bulbs harvested, so select seed garlic with large cloves.

When planting, select a location that gets full sun and has loose, well-drained soil. Garlic does best in fertile soil, so you may need to enhance your planting bed with compost. You should also add an organic nitrogen source at planting, such as earthworm castings.

A head of garlic is grown from a single clove. Seed garlic is usually sold in heads that you will need to separate into single cloves just before planting. Plant the cloves with the pointy end up in

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about one to two inches of soil. Space the rows 12 inches apart and leave six inches between the cloves. For elephant garlic, double the space between rows and cloves. Cover the cloves with soil and add about four inches of mulch to help prevent wide soil temperature fluctuations. Garlic prefers a high soil moisture level, but do not over-water it as it may rot. A good rule of thumb is to water the garlic after you plant it and then only when the soil dries out until the winter rains come.

In the springtime, you'll begin to see leaves emerging, so be sure to add a second feeding of nitrogen fertilizer. If you are growing hardneck garlic, watch for scapes to emerge from the leaves, and trim these off when they are still supple so that the bulbs will grow longer. Scapes are curly stems with a little bulge on the end that will turn into flowers. Scapes are edible and are a delicious garlic-flavored addition to many dishes.

You'll know the garlic is ready when the stems turn yellow and the bottom three or four leaves of the plant turn brown. You'll want to stop watering the garlic at this point and wait a couple of weeks to let the garlic bulbs harden. To harvest, dig carefully around each garlic bulb and gently lift it out of the ground - do not cut or remove the stem. Dry the bulbs by laying them on the ground for several days, shading them with the leaves from other plants to prevent sunburn, and keep them dry to prevent rot. You can also place them in a warm, dry shaded area with good air circulation. If you want to braid the stems of softneck garlic, it's best to do so when the stems are still flexible. Once the garlic bulbs are dry, you can remove the stems about one inch above the bulbs, although the longer the tops stay on, the longer the storage life will be. Be sure to brush any dirt off the roots, or trim the roots for a neater appearance, and store the garlic in a cool, dry place.

The next public education class is a tour of the Native Plants Garden at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden with Master Gardener Alice Cantelow. Join her for a discussion on choosing those undemanding plants which bring color to the garden along with the wildlife, pollinators, and birds we enjoy. Saturday, September 29, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Class is free, campus parking is \$2.

Join us on February 23 at the Shingle Springs Rancheria for an all-day workshop on Sustainable Organic Gardening. Topics include soil, seed saving, pest management and composting. Cost is \$25 and includes a lite lunch. See the Sustainable Organic Gardening workshop webpage for more information and registration - <http://ucanr.edu/sustainable-organic-gardening>.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center. The garden is open Fridays and Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to noon.

For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.