

## GROWING GREAT GARLIC

Garlic is a fantastic winter crop requiring little special attention. For the home gardener, garlic has few pests, is not particularly prone to being nibbled by marsupial marauders and tastes far superior to most of the stuff found in supermarkets. Southern Harvest grows garlic without chemicals or sprays. Our purple-skinned garlic is a 'hard-neck' variety, producing a woody, rigid flower stalk. This variety grows throughout the world and tends to get re-badged wherever it travels. Locally, it's known as 'Tassie Purple'.

### ***CLIMATE:***

Garlic needs a cold winter, a moist spring and a warm, reasonably dry November and December. For these reasons, garlic grows well in Tasmania, Victoria and the cooler parts of New South Wales. The cold triggers germination, as well as ensuring that biting flavour, so make sure not to store your garlic in the fridge!

### ***SOIL:***

Garlic grows well in most soils, but dislikes wet 'feet'. If you have poor draining soils you may be best growing your garlic in raised beds or even pots. If you have some clay, make sure you raise your garden beds at least 100mm.

At Southern Harvest, we have a clay loam topsoil that quickly changes to a light clay. Before planting we add 10-20mm of compost, kelp (1 cup per m<sup>2</sup>) and a dusting of ag-lime and blood and bone.

### ***PLANTING:***

Forget the adage to plant at winter solstice and harvest at summer solstice. We plant our garlic in April and usually harvest in December.

- Separate the garlic heads into individual cloves. Each clove that you plant will grow into a new garlic head.
- Plant the cloves on top of the surface (pointy end up), pressing down firmly until the bottom is 5 – 10 mm into the soil. If you have lighter soils, plant the clove 30 – 40 mm below the surface.
- Shallow planting ensures the whole garlic, and not just the snapped-off stem, gets pulled from summer-dry ground!
- We plant our garlic 15 cm apart within a row and 40 - 50 cm between the rows.
- Mulch with straw after planting to keep the weeds down. If you don't mind weeding there is no need to mulch.
- Some people believe snapping off the flower stalk, which appears in spring, creates a bigger bulb. We have experimented with this and believe removing the stalk does not affect size and may even create a vector for moulds. We leave the flower stalk on.

### ***HARVESTING:***

We get a bit desperate for garlic in spring (when the previous crop has well and truly run out), so we pull some of our garlic early. If the bulb is yet to grow it looks more like a spring onion, but the taste is there. Or we use the very small cloves.

- We harvest when about half the leaves have dried off and started to brown, which is usually in early to mid-December. Harvesting times vary depending on the season and different locations.
- Garlic is fairly susceptible to mould and fungus, which will shorten its keeping life or rot them out all together. For this reason it is important not to water your garlic for 2-3 weeks prior to harvest (and hope it does not rain too much).
- Garlic left in the ground too long tends to split, allowing soil, moisture and potentially disease to get in.
- Pull the garlic out by the stem (or with a garden fork if your soil is hard, but be careful not to damage the garlic).
- Bunch the garlic into groups of 10 – 15 and loosely tie together with twine. Hang to cure in a dry and well ventilated shed or room.
- Do not harvest your garlic if it has recently rained, drizzled or there's been a heavy dew; it is best to wait a few days for the weather to dry it off naturally. Curing/hanging damp garlic is a sure way to invite mould.
- If you wish to plait your garlic, leave it to hang for two weeks, plait while the necks have not hardened off and then hang again for another 2 – 4 weeks.
- Once the garlic has cured, clip off the root and the tops about 30mm above the garlic head and store in a dry, well-ventilated area, in the way you store onions..
- The garlic should stay firm for 8 – 10 months (if stored properly). The medium to smaller sized garlic keeps much longer than the larger garlic heads, so eat your larger garlic first.



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