

The Stinking Rose

a.k.a. Garlic

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It is garlic season again! Most people do not think of garlic as a plant that they can grow themselves at home. It is one of the easiest edibles to grow and if stored properly the heads of garlic you harvest can last all year. This article is meant to provide a basic introduction to the types of garlic, how to grow and harvest it, and why it makes for an ideal addition to anyone's landscape.

There are hundreds of varieties to choose from with quite a range of flavors. We struggled to pick only the six best varieties for our climate. Just like oranges and apples, no two varieties are exactly the same. For garlic, there are two main **classifications**: hardneck and softneck. Here in southern California we most successfully grow softneck garlic.

Each named variety has enormous variability. The main distinctions are skin color, boldness of flavor, head size, number of cloves (the individual segments) per head, and the size of the cloves themselves. When **selecting a variety to grow** (I like to grow several different kinds at once) you may decide you prefer four huge mild flavored cloves rather than ten smaller spicy cloves to a head.

As a **landscape plant**, garlic is very useful. I want to make the initial distinction that the garlic you grow to eat is not to be confused with society garlic, the purple flowering landscape plant seen in many commercial gardens. These are not the same thing. Garlic grown in California is known for its silver green narrow leaves and the edible cloves that multiply while hidden under the ground. It does not smell in the sun like society garlic and it is a foliage only plant - no flowers are produced.



How do you plant garlic at home? When you buy the plants from our nursery, we take the initial steps for you. A clove is placed in good quality soil and buried an inch or two below the dirt. Planted too deep your clove will rot; too shallow and the ground's changing temperature will heave the cloves out of the dirt and they will dry out. In a month or two, a narrow green leaf will pop out of the ground to signify that the roots have begun to grow. By spring you will have a 12-24" plant with many narrow leaves. The exact shape and form of the plant changes by variety. Some twist and curl, others bend, and still others stick out straight! Each is unique and striking in the garden.



In the summer, as the weather begins to stay consistently warm, the garlic plant's leaves will begin to die back. When about half of the leaves have changed color you can begin **harvesting**. Each variety is ready at a different time (like oranges and apples). Gardeners who choose to dig them up will find that the one clove (or nursery pot) had multiplied into a whole head of garlic! The heads (with leaves) should be hung indoors out of the sun to dry. Once a dry skin has formed over the head it should look like the garlic you buy on the grocery store. You then cut off the dried remnants of the leaves and discard them. The garlic heads can be stored in a paper bag in a cool dry place for 9-12 months until you are ready to eat them!

You can reserve some of the cloves each year for **replanting**. If you are like my family, however, you will never quite manage to keep some in reserve! The rule of thumb is to save 25% each year so you never have to buy more (good luck with that!). If you choose not to harvest the garlic, you can treat it like any other landscape plant. You would just cut off the yellowed leaves in the summer and they would resprout again in the fall.



This is a particularly **useful plant for those that are afflicted with rodent or gopher problems**. The leaves and cloves taste spicy to the animals and they tend to avoid them as a result. It is also extremely **frost hardy** which is useful for many of our customers. Garlic is a unique addition to Mediterranean gardens though its simplicity and clean lines work with any landscape style.



It is considered a **mid-height plant** that will work well in between taller shrubs and lower growing annual or perennial flowers. They do not take up much room because they are narrow. I typically space them about twelve inches apart. You can also plant the cloves in raised garden beds with other edibles or cut flowers. You can place them closer together in this context.

Garlic can survive a good deal of drought and particularly thrives when watered by drip **irrigation**. I experimented with not watering some of my garlic plants at all and while they did survive, the garlic produced was not as good as their counter parts that were watered on drip.

Some people have asked why they can't just start with cloves they get from the **grocery store**. First off, those varieties are usually not the most flavorful or unique, just the fastest producing for commercial purposes. Secondly, they are often treated to prevent sprouting and limit the multiplication of cloves. In short, they don't want you to grow your own so they try their best to stop you!

I have also been asked **how much to plant** if you intend to harvest and use the garlic (not just as a landscape plant). That really depends on how much garlic your family eats each year. Each one gallon we sell makes a good sized (some huge!) head of garlic the first year. You would want to plant as many buckets as you would eat heads of garlic in a year! Be sure to count on theft from relatives and friends. As soon as everyone tasted my garlic, it started to disappear at a great rate!



Why grow your own garlic? As anyone who has ever compared fruit purchased in the grocery store to home grown can attest, the flavor is wildly better! The product is fresher and it makes for good dinner conversation. It is also really gratifying to watch the plant sprout and grow knowing what is happening under the ground. Once you have grown your own, you will never want to go back!

What kinds of garlic do we carry?

Artichoke: the easiest variety to grow. They tolerate a wide range of climates and soil types, and give the highest yield of any variety. Their flavor tends to be on the milder side.

Inchelium Red: Has four to five clove layers with 8 to 20 cloves. Mild but lingering flavor with a tingle!

Early Red Italian: A robust grower with 11 to 21 cloves. Cloves are fat, round, and milky white. Matures early.

Red Toche: Cloves are streaked with red and pink. Very popular variety.

Silverskins: do especially well in wet or mild climates as well as colder ones. They have delicate tops, which make beautiful braids. The bulbs have a satin like appearance and store longer than any other type.

Silver White: Large bulbed garlic has proved productive in both cold winter and hot summer climates. Similar to Mild French.

S&H Silver: Clove colors off white to tank with pink blush tips. Bottom half of clove is tannish brown. Cloves are tall and concave, 15 to 20 per bulb.

California Select: Large symmetrical bulb, nice for braiding. Does particularly well in our California climate!

How much do they cost? \$2.48 each