

KNOWING AND GROWING GARLIC

Garlics' history is recorded in 400BC and is known for its' protective, medicinal, ornamental and culinary properties. Guarding against vampires, the plague and evil spirits, as well as protecting sailors against shipwrecks and mountaineers from bad weather were just a few of the deemed protective properties. Medicinally it is the champion herb for lowering cholesterol and high blood pressure as well as being a powerful antibiotic. It is effective in treating bronchial and digestive infections and also reduces diabetic blood sugar levels and its antifungal properties have been used to combat yeast and fungal infections such as athletes' foot and candida. It is also used in a natural immune process for destroying cancer cells.

When raw garlic is sliced or crushed alliin and the enzyme, allinase combine to form the healing sulfur compound allicin.

A herbal reference guide lists the following:

Properties: adaptogen, alterative, antibiotic, anticoagulant, antifungal, antineoplastic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, blood purifier, diaphoretic, digestive, expectorant, febrifuge, rubefacient, stimulant, vulnerary.

Primary nutrients: calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorous, potassium, selenium, sodium, sulphur, vitamins A, B-complex and C.

TYPES OF GARLIC

Rocambole, also known as Ophio or hard neck garlic, has a hard core in the center which makes braiding very difficult. The individual cloves, however are very easy to peel and are preferred by gourmet cooks for their clove size and flavor.

Sativum or soft neck does not have a neck and is very easily braided. The cloves, however, are difficult to peel and are usually crushed to facilitate peeling.

Elephant garlic which actually a leek (*Allium scorodoprasum*) is a very large cloved garlic with a much blander flavor.

GROWING GARLIC

Planting

Purchase your garlic from a garden center or reputable grower. Do not use supermarket garlic as it has been treated with a growth inhibitor to prevent sprouting.

Planting should be done in the fall –anytime from late September through November - typically the same time as other fall bulbs. If planting in a garden plot, work the soil to fine tilth incorporating lime in acid soils. Dig a narrow trench 5 to 6 inches deep line the bottom of the trench with your choice of bulb fertilizer or compost and cover with one inch of soil. Break the head of garlic into individual cloves and push each clove point side up 4 to 6 inches apart in the bottom of the trench. Rows should be 8 to 10 inches apart to enable easy weeding. Fill in the trench, tamp firmly and label or mark each row. Mulch with leaves or grass clippings which helps keep weeds down and add additional slow release fertilizing.

In spring watch for sprouting – keep weed free – feed and water.

In summer (June) attractive seed heads form at the top of the twisted or spiral hard necks (Rocamboles) reaching as much as a meter in height and used extensively in floral art. These tops are also excellent used in stirfrys for a delicate garlic flavor. In July start counting the number of leaves on each stalk – each leaf is sheath covering the cloves in the head – and harvest when there at least five or six leaves to prevent your head from shattering. When harvesting do not water for a few days and try to harvest on a cloudy day – do not leave harvested garlic in the sun to cure as it will start to cook and will not store well. Place harvested garlic in airy dry area to cure for 4 – 6 weeks – usually mid August.

Cleaning garlic is necessary before storing. Use cutter to cut top off about ½ inch from the head and cut the dried roots about 1/3 inch from the bottom. Use a old soft toothbrush to clean the head and root bottom and store in brown paper bag if not braiding.