

Garlic

Scientific Name: Allium Sativum

Other names: Garlic is also known as rocambole, ajo, allium, stinking rose, rustic treacle, nectar of the gods, camphor of the poor, poor man's treacle

Plant Family: Amaryllidaceae, subfamily Allioideae

EarthDance Varieties: Softneck

Other varieties for midwest growers: hardneck types--Georgian Crystal, Music, Carpathian, Spanish Roja, Metechi, and Persian Star, and softneck types--Inchelium Red and Idaho Silverskin.

Varieties: There are 2 major categories of garlic-Softneck and Hardneck. Softnecks are adapted to a wider range of climates, they keep longer in storage (which is why supermarket garlics are almost always of this type), they tend to mature faster, and they're generally more productive than hardnecks. The stems of softnecks are easier to braid, but the cloves are comparatively hard to peel. Hardnecks demand a little more attention than softnecks to produce good-quality large bulbs. But they are more colorful and offer more variety of flavor. They also produce a flower stalk or scape, prized for its delicate flavor when harvested in spring while it is still tender. Removing the scape also encourages more vigorous bulb production. (Some softnecks can occasionally develop flower stalks).

Planting: Garlic is relatively easy to grow, requiring full sun, and deep well-drained, soil. Planting time is critical as shoot and bulb development require cold treatment. Most of the leaf growth will occur when it is cool and day lengths are short. Leaf growth stops and bulb formation begins when it becomes warmer and day lengths are long. Planting garlic in the fall, six weeks before the ground freezes, is the best way to ensure that the plants will begin to emerge in early spring. When planted, one clove of garlic yields one bulb of garlic.

Harvesting: From early summer to midsummer, watch plants closely and pull them when about one-third of the leaves appear pale and withered. Use a digging fork to loosen the soil before pulling the plants. Lay the whole plants out to dry in a warm, airy spot that is protected from rain and direct sun. After a week or so, brush off soil from the bulbs with your hands, and use pruning shears to clip roots to half an inch long. Wait another week before clipping off the stems of hardneck varieties or trimming and braiding softnecks into clusters. Do not remove the papery outer wrappers, as these inhibit sprouting and protect the cloves from rotting.

History & Folklore

All garlic cultivars are considered to be derived from ten specific varieties of garlic that evolved in the Caucasus Mountains between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Over centuries, garlic's evolution began with fertile plants, continued with sterile plants and ended with non-bolting "genotypes". Primitive garlic had more cold-hardiness, heat tolerance, larger numbers of foliage, and a later maturity stage than that of modern sterile varieties.

Throughout history garlic has been seen by cultures as sacred and a means to ward off evil and provide protection from diseases of the body and/or spirit. Garlic was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians, chewed by Greek Olympian athletes and thought to be essential for keeping vampires at bay! Some of the examples of the ways garlic has been used throughout history include:

- The ancient Egyptians often buried garlic with the dead and used it in rituals;
- In France during the early 1700's gravediggers drank a concoction of crushed Garlic in wine which they believed would protect them from getting the plague that killed many people in Europe;
- It was crushed and placed on wounds to stop them from turning septic and to prevent gangrene during both World Wars of the 20th century

Common Health/Medicinal Uses of Garlic Today

Garlic has been prized since the first records of civilization and is one of nature's most versatile medicinal plant. It contains more than 100 sulfur compounds, which may help promote healthy arteries and cholesterol levels. Allicin, the best known, is formed when cloves are crushed, chopped or chewed, releasing its characteristic scent and flavor. Garlic has antioxidant, antibiotic, antiviral, and antifungal characteristics and has been used all over the world for thousands of years for a wide range of conditions including:

- to reduce blood pressure, cholesterol and hardening of the arteries and blood clotting;
- to prevent cancer;
- to protect the liver;
- to reduce menstrual pain;
- to increase the effects of the immune system;
- to reduce blood sugar levels;

- and topically as well as orally to treat corns, warts, calluses, ear infections, muscle & nerve pain, arthritis, and sciatica

The Best Part...Eating Garlic!

Garlic can be eaten a variety of ways including raw or cooked. Crushing, chopping, pressing or pureeing garlic releases its oils providing a sharper flavor than slicing or leaving it whole.

Selecting: Look for bulbs that are plump and compact with several layers of dry, papery husk. Spring garlic (also called garlic greens) is a younger, delicately flavored type that can be chopped and added raw to soups or salads. Elephant garlic is not true garlic at all, but is actually a type of leek; it does not provide the same health benefits as regular garlic and has much milder flavor.

Storing: Garlic will keep for a few weeks to a few months, depending on its variety, freshness when purchased, and storage conditions. Garlic may be kept in the refrigerator for up to a week, but refrigeration is not advised for long-term storage. Do not store uncooked garlic in the freezer; freezing destroys its texture and adds an acid flavor. Never store raw garlic in oil at room temperature; this can lead to botulism, a potentially lethal form of food poisoning. Garlic has the potential to sprout, which diminishes its pungency and flavor. To prevent this, keep garlic in a loosely covered container and put it in a cool, dark place away from sunlight/heat.

Preparation: To easily peel garlic, separate the cloves from the bulb and place them on a cutting board. Lay the flat side of a broad knife on top of one clove at a time. Tap the knife with a closed fist. A fairly gentle impact is all that's required to split the peels without smashing the clove. Roasting whole garlic bulbs will mellow its flavor and transform cloves into a spreadable consistency. If you're hoping to receive the touted health benefits from cooked garlic, you must chop or crush the cloves and then wait a few minutes for the allicin compound to form before applying heat; also keep cooking time to a minimum.

Fun Fact: Americans consume more than three pounds of garlic per person annually.

Whipped Garlic Sauce ("Toum")

...taken from *What's Gaby Cooking* weblog

Ingredients

- 1 2 cups grapeseed oil or other light veg oil (do NOT use olive oil)
- 2 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 3 1/2 cup freshly peeled garlic
- 4 1 tsp salt

Instructions

1. Place the peeled garlic and salt into a food processor. pulse for 1 minutes until the garlic is broken down into small pieces.
2. Turn the food processor on and *SLOWLY* stream in 1/2 cup of the grapeseed oil followed by 1 tbsp of the lemon juice. Let the mixture combine for about 1-2 minutes and then repeat this process 3 more times until all your ingredients have been used up. Be sure to add the oil slowly each time.
3. Adjust salt if needed and serve with veggies, chicken, pita, or just about anything! Beware...it can become highly addictive....

** For tonight's "sample" I added some egg white to thicken it to use as a dip—otherwise the sauce is the consistency of salad dressing.