**Growing Garlic**

**What is the Difference Between Soft Neck Garlic and Hard Neck Garlic?**

Hard neck garlic is planted in the late fall, allowed to overwinter in the soil, then harvested mid-summer. Overwintering induces flowering and the bulb produces an edible flower stalk called a scape. This is to be removed so your plants can put energy into the bulb. The hard neck is in reference to the very hard scape stem that remains in the center of the garlic bulb up through the neck even after curing.   
  
 Soft neck garlic is planted in the spring and grown through the warm growing season and harvested when the leaves start to fade at the end of the season. Soft neck garlic does not produce a scape as it didn’t get overwintered to induce blooming. The advantage to soft neck garlic is that it stores much better. Soft neck garlic is also the type of garlic that you will see in garlic braids! Since it doesn’t have a hard scape stem it is easily braidable to hang and store.

Soft neck garlic varieties do not do well overwintering within the soil. Similarly, hard neck varieties do not make good soft neck garlic. They require a cold stratification to have a successful crop. Hard neck garlic does tend to perform better in cooler climates and soft neck does tend to perform better in warmer climates.

**When and How Are They Planted?**

The best time to plant the hard neck garlic is usually around a week or two after the first good killing frost in the fall. This is often mid-October here in southern Minnesota, but it varies season to season. Soft neck can be planted as soon soil temps reach 60 degrees in the spring.

To plant the garlic, separate out each individual clove from the garlic carefully. Note the scar on the bottom of the clove. This scar needs to be pointed down when planted. The bottom of your planting hole needs to be 2-3 inches deep into the soil. Which means the tip could be anywhere from 1/8th inch to 1 inch below the soil surface depending on the size of the cloves. Plant the cloves 5-6 inches apart.

Once planted and watered in, it is very important to mulch them very well. For hard neck garlic, this means using 3-4 inches of organic matter like grass clippings, chopped leaves, straw, or anything similar. This insulates the clove from fluctuating early and late winter temperatures, so the garlic doesn’t wake up too early. In the spring the mulching can be pulled away from the garlic plants but keep some around to help maintain moisture and combat weeds as garlic is not very competitive. Soft neck garlic also appreciates mulching after planting but a couple inches would be plenty.

**Caring for Your Garlic Plants**

Garlic needs consistent moisture. Soak the plants when water so the soil is saturated down to at least an inch. Garlic is a moderate Nitrogen feeder so giving it fertilizer throughout the season is important. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to incorporate urea or a similar nitrogen source into the soil prior to planting (1 lb per 100 square feet using urea as an example). Then side dress additional nitrogen (or liquid nitrogen feed) once the garlic stems emerge then one more time 3 weeks later. Be sure to remove the flower stalk on the hard neck garlic (also known as the scape) when it begins to develop to preserve energy for larger garlic bulbs. The scapes are edible and make great additions to canning or grilling. When harvest time is approaching cut back on watering.

**Harvesting Garlic**

Harvest time for garlic is typically in July depending on the growing season. As the season progresses closer to harvest time the lower leaves will start to brown. Once slightly less than half of the leaves brown your garlic is ready for harvest. Once harvested, place the entire plant in a warm dry location for 3-4 weeks to cure. After curing, clip the roots to the base of the bulb and clip the stock down to about an inch above the bulb. Now you’re ready to use or store your garlic! Store in a dark, cool (60-65 degrees) dry location for the best longevity. Soft neck garlic can be braided, and the braids can be hung in storage—they can last a year this way.

**What about Elephant Garlic?**

Elephant garlic is a very interesting plant! It grows 3-6 massive cloves and it is grown the same way you would grow any other garlic. It can be planted like a soft neck (in the spring) or like a hard neck (in the fall) too! Since they’re so large these need to be planted 4-6 inches deep and 8-12 inches parat Elephant garlic is not a true garlic, it is closer in relation to Leeks. This is why it has a slight oniony flavor.