

Growing Garlic (*Allium, sativum*)

It's that time of the year again, ANZAC day is here, and it is the Australian traditional time to plant out your Garlic. Of course you can plant at a later date or even a little earlier if you want to. Garlic takes about 6 months to grow. It is worth the wait as it is a wonderful vegetable to have in your kitchen and so good for your heart, blood and cholesterol.

Garlic originated in central Asia and was probably spread by the nomadic Mongols. Romans, Egyptians and Chinese grew and used Garlic centuries ago. Many myths about Garlic abound. To grow Garlic, break off the cloves from the central cluster, use the biggest ones to plant. It's not usual that garlic is grown from seed, as it is very rare that the seed it produces is viable.

GARDEN PREPARATION

Garlic likes an open situation, in a well-drained soil, it doesn't like 'wet feet'. In our Perth Hills area, growing from Autumn through winter will give the best results. Garlic likes a couple of months of cold weather to do well and to gain some taste. Most of the Garlic we grow is 'day light sensitive', meaning that it will not bulb up until the longer and warmer days begin.

Re furbish your garden bed with compost or animal manure (not chicken) at about a bag per square metre, and spread on to that a good big handful of Dolomite per square metre. Garlic loves a high pH, 6.5 to 8, and it will satisfy its requirement for Calcium and Magnesium. Also spread a handful of Sulphate of Potash per square metre as well. Run a handful of Potash per metre length down the line of cloves as the days start to lengthen. Dig in carefully and water.

Don't forget the minerals the bacteria and the organic fertiliser as recommended. Dig in and water well. Plant the cloves pointy end UP and deep enough to cover them about a couple of centimetres. Firm down well, as some times the roots will push them out.

During the growing season keep up the feeding programme that is recommended, as leaf growth is needed to supply the forming cloves with nutrients to be big and fat. Some of the plants will send up flowering shoots (usually hard neck ones) cut them off when they are soft and young, and add to stews etc.

When the leaves start to yellow, it's time to harvest. Stop watering for a week or so to dry them out, then lift and allow to dry in a warm airy spot. Don't let the sun get at them as it will probably 'cook' them. Brush the dirt off them and cut the leaf off but leave some 'neck' on them, then store them in a cool airy spot, or plait the leaves and hang in an appropriate place.

The Vampires won't visit your house!

Ralph D,
for the Down to Earth team. 21/04/15.