

All About Garlic

by Kris Hart

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One fantastic addition to your garden is garlic. Not only is garlic a delicious food item to provide yourself with, but due to its pungent aroma, it does a great job of keeping pests away.

Considering there are over 200 unique varieties, it may be hard to narrow the choices down. Different garlic varieties do well in different climates. Choosing a variety that

does well with our Midwest winters will be our best bet to a lucrative harvest in the early summer when the bottom few leaves turn brown. Learning about the different types will help you choose which variety will best meet your culinary desires and storage needs.

There are two main types of garlic: soft neck and hard neck garlic. When choosing your garden garlic varieties, it's important to understand the differences between these two kinds of garlic. Soft neck varieties will have a milder flavor than the hard neck varieties. They will also produce bulbs with more cloves and tend to keep longer in storage due to the many more papery layers surrounding the bulb.

The neat thing about hard neck varieties is that while they produce fewer cloves per bulb, they are quite robust in flavor. Hard neck varieties also tend to be much stronger through hard winters. They even give you a bonus crop in their scapes. A garlic scape is a stem on which a seed head forms. If this is allowed to mature, the plant will push all of its energy into this seed head. However, if you cut it off, the plant will push its energy into the bulb, plumping it up for you. Scapes are not as strong in flavor as a garlic clove, but can be used as scallions and in stir-fries.

The best time to plant your garlic is right after a light frost. Keep in mind that garlic does not compete well for resources in the soil, so make sure to compost and give your garlic bed a good mulching to keep the weeds out. Spacing is important as well and most varieties like at least 6 inches of spacing and to be planted as deep as they are tall. As silly as it may sound to some, make sure your garlic is planted the right way. The root end of your garlic is somewhat flat and then the bulb tapers up to a point. The point should be pointing up and the root end down. If your garlic is not oriented this way in the soil, it won't grow.

I hope this encourages you to not only think about kitchen gardening, but also beauty gardening. I hope you get out there and get your hands dirty! Please feel free to share your experience and tips on my Instagram or Facebook page @BottomViewFarmIL.

Kris Hart lives in Litchfield and has a small hobby farm making strides towards sustainable living and organic/heirloom gardening. Contact her at kris.hart17@yahoo.com or find Bottom View Farm on Facebook and Instagram.

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