

Gourds, Ghouls, and Glorious Garlic

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How to Plant and Harvest Vampire Repellent Garlic

A relative of onions, chives, and shallots, garlic is easy to grow. Garlic is best planted when the soil is still warm, nights are cool, and frost is six to eight weeks away. Garlic needs a head start on sprouting before winter arrives. Buy seed garlic at your garden center or order from nursery catalogues or online. Recommended suppliers include Rene's Garden, Burpee, Territorial Seed, Dominion Seed House, Harris Seeds, or Botanical Interests. Gardener's Supply offers unique garlic grow bags. When in a pinch, I have even planted cloves from the grocery store and they thrive.

1. Choose a sunny spot.
2. Prepare the soil. Garlic prefers well-drained soil mixed with rich, organic matter.
3. Separate the garlic bulb into cloves.
4. Plant each clove about 1 ½ inches deep, 6 inches apart with the root pointing down (that's the round part) and the tip reaching for the sun.
5. Cover with soil. Add a thick layer of straw for warmth and protection.
6. Maintain a level of 3 inches of mulch covering throughout the winter.
7. Harvesting begins in late spring when the leaves dry and flop over.
8. Gently tug until the bulb comes out. Garlic is ready if it is round and plump.
9. After you've shaken the dirt off your bulbs, place the plants on a flat or lay on top of the soil in the garden to dry for at least a week.
10. Once the bulbs are dry and the skins are papery, you can weave garlands to hang to dry. Or cut off the tops, trim the roots, and single layer the bulbs on a sheet to dry for several more weeks. To reduce the potential for rot, make sure there is plenty of air circulation.
11. Store in a cool, dry place. "Garlic Keepers" which are bags or pots (ceramic, terra cotta, or metal) with holes for circulation work well. When stored properly, garlic bulbs will remain fresh and pungent for seven months.

With my Italian heritage, I can't imagine a meal without garlic. In our household, it turns ordinary dishes into culinary masterpieces. We also use it for a plethora of medicinal purposes from putting cloves in our pets' food to deter ticks and worms, to using it with warm olive oil to soothe an earache or calm a cough. Mosquitoes and insects avoid me when I devour cloves of raw garlic. (Of course, humans and unseen devils keep their distance as well!)

Herbalists recommend garlic to combat illnesses including high cholesterol, colds, flu, coughs, bronchitis, fever, ringworm, and digestive issues. There is mounting scientific evidence that garlic could prevent heart disease, lower cholesterol, and protect against some cancers. I agree with Louis Diat's words about this curative bulb, "Without garlic I simply would not care to live."

Plant enough cloves and you'll have plenty of the stinking rose for eating, healing, and keeping ghouls, ghosts, and gremlins at bay!

Happy Halloween, Happy Gardening, Happy Growing, Happy Garlic Breath! Booooo!



Hang garlic garlands to dry as well as ward off the warlocks, witches, vampires, and evil eye. Garlic chives in bloom.



A basket of pumpkins, gourds, and squash decorates a front porch.