

## Glorious garlic: A stinking good guide to success – By Kirsten Crombie



Garlic isn't just a flavour bomb for your cooking—it's a gardener's delight, a natural pest repellent, and an all-around veggie patch champion. Growing it is simple, but to get fat, flavourful bulbs, you'll need a few tricks. Let's dig in!

### When and how to plant

Timing is everything. Garlic is a winter crop that needs cold, moist soil to produce good-sized bulbs. In warm climates, choose a sub-tropical variety like Glen Large, Southern Glen, Italian Pink, or Elephant. Plant by late March so cloves establish roots before winter.

Pick a sunny, well-drained spot. Break a healthy bulb into cloves, keeping the skins intact. Plant each clove pointy end up, 2-3 cm deep and 10-15 cm apart. Space rows 30-40 cm apart. Water well and apply compost and mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds.

### Give your garlic the good stuff

Garlic may be a humble bulb, but it's got high standards when it comes to soil. It thrives in well-draining, nutrient-rich soil with a pH of 6-7.5—think loamy and organic-rich. Before planting, boost beds with compost and well-rotted manure. Garlic likes food but hates wet feet, so water moderately to keep the soil lightly moist. If your soil is too acidic, a sprinkle of lime helps.

### Patience is key

Garlic is a long-haul crop, and the subtropical varieties above take around six months to mature. How to tell if your garlic is ready? The lower leaves will yellow and die off while the upper ones stay green. For subtropical varieties, harvest when 6-7 green leaves remain.

Gently lift bulbs with a fork, avoiding bruising. Shake off loose dirt but don't brush or wash bulbs, as this reduces storage life. Cure by hanging bunches or spreading them on racks in a dry, shady spot until the skins are papery and firm.

### Garlic gripes and how to handle them

Even the best gardeners encounter a hiccup or two. Here's how to troubleshoot common garlic gripes:

- **Tiny bulbs?** You might have planted too late, or the soil wasn't rich enough. Garlic is a greedy feeder—next time, add more compost and plant earlier.
- **Weirdly shaped or split bulbs?** Inconsistent watering or letting them dry out too much can stress the plants. Try to keep things even throughout the growing season and make sure your soil drains well.
- **Pest problems?** Aphids and onion thrips love garlic. If you spot these sap suckers, try a neem oil spray or introduce beneficial insects like ladybirds to keep them under control.

- **Yellowing leaves and weak growth?** This could be a sign of nutrient deficiencies, particularly nitrogen. Add compost, aged manure, or an organic fertiliser to give your plants a boost.

By following these tips, you'll be well on your way to harvesting a bountiful crop of home-grown garlic. Happy gardening!

(Image source: <https://unsplash.com/photos/white-garlic-on-black-table-2yNBQFwZCA8> image by Tijana Drndarski.)