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Planting Garlic: 2 crops for the effort of 1

(information sourced from Rodale's Organic Life website - www.rodalesorganiclife.com, and some misc websites)

Garlic is a crop that has 2 harvests. In early to mid July, the plant will send up a curling stem that is called a garlic scape, this is edible. Once the scape is removed you can look forward to a garlic harvest in around a month. Two harvests for the effort of one. It's an easy crop that yields results in less than a year. Not only is it easy to grow, but it's also a beautiful addition to your garden. Here's a step-by-step guide:

Soil Preparation: Garlic will tolerate some shade but prefers full sun. Garlic responds best in well-drained, rich, loamy soil *amended with lots of organic matter*. Raised beds are ideal, except in very dry regions. It does not like being wet and soggy over the winter. If your bed tends to be wet in winter, hill your rows to improve drainage.

Planting: Mid to late October. Each clove (the sections of the bulb) will produce a new bulb, and the largest cloves generally yield the biggest bulbs. To get the cloves off to a strong start and protect them from fungal diseases, you can soak them in a jar of water containing a heaping tablespoon of baking soda and a tablespoon of liquid seaweed for a few hours before planting. Make sure to rotate your garlic beds every year, don't re use the same bed for at least 4 years. (this reduces insect and disease problems)

Spacing: Place cloves in a hole or furrow with the flat or root-end down and pointed-end up, with each tip 2 inches beneath the soil. Set the cloves about 5-6 inches apart in a grid.

Mulching After planting, top the soil with lots of mulch, such as straw or dried grass clippings mixed with leaves. Remove the mulch in early spring until the soil warms up then re-cover the garlic bed with the mulch. Mulch conserves moisture and suppresses weeds (garlic competes poorly with weeds).

Watering Garlic needs about an inch of water each week during spring growth. With adequate mulch you rarely need to water in New Brunswick. If late May is dry, you may need to water.

Scape Sacrifice By early July, your garlic will send up a flower stalk that curls as they mature. These savory stalks, known as scapes, should be removed once they curl to encourage larger, more efficient bulb growth. They are edible with a mild garlic flavor. If the scape is left on the plant it will flower and produce seed (which look like baby garlic cloves) Ideally you should remove the stem once it has one or 2 curls, it snaps off easily just above the leaves. Doing this will let the plant energy go to making a bigger garlic bulb rather than producing seed.

The scape can be used any way that garlic can, it is edible including the flower tip. I make garlic scape butter by blending the scapes with butter, this can then be divided and frozen to use later anywhere you want garlic butter. They can be sautéed, roasted, pickled, the sky is the limit with this versatile first crop of the garlic plant

Fertilizing Start foliar-feeding your garlic every 2 weeks as soon as leaf growth begins in spring and continue until the scapes appear. You can use 1 tablespoon liquid seaweed mix and 1 tablespoon fish emulsion mixed into a gallon of water. This isn't really necessary with a good fertile garden bed.

Harvesting Hints When half to three-quarters of the leaves turn yellow-brown, typically in August it's harvest time. Carefully dig up each bulb; do not pull, or you may break the stalk from the bulb, which can cause it to rot. If they are left in the ground too long after the die back of the leaves, the outer layer of the bulb will rot leaving unprotected cloves. Leave harvested bulbs in the sun for a few hours to dry the outer layers. Tie the garlic together in bundles of 6 to 10 bulbs (label them if you've grown more than one variety) and hang them to cure for about several weeks in a shaded, dry, and preferably drafty area. Alternatively you can just lay them flat on a surface in a single layer. When your garlic is thoroughly dry, trim the roots, taking care not to knock off the outer skin. Cut off the stalks about 1½ inches above the bulb if you plan to keep the garlic in bags. Recycled mesh onion bags are perfect for storage. Do not store in the fridge or a closed container. They should keep well the whole winter.

Saving for the next planting season Save the best bulbs to replant in the Fall. No cross-pollination happens with garlic. The cloves will produce bulbs just like the ones from which they came. Some sources recommend refreshing your garlic after several years by taking the seeds from the scape and planting them. These will form a single clove the first year (a round), and usually take 3 seasons to get a full sized garlic bulb. Most people find this is not necessary.

Companions: Can be planted with most vegetables, except for beans and peas

Varieties: Soft Necks have a stalk that ends above the cloves instead of being surrounded by them. They are easier to braid than Hard Necks but cloves are generally smaller and more variable. Hard Necks or Rocamboles have a hard stalk that is surrounded by large, wedge-shaped, easy-to-peel cloves.

