

Growing Garlic
September 6, 2025

Ask a Master Gardener

Timely insights on relevant topics from our area's home gardening experts

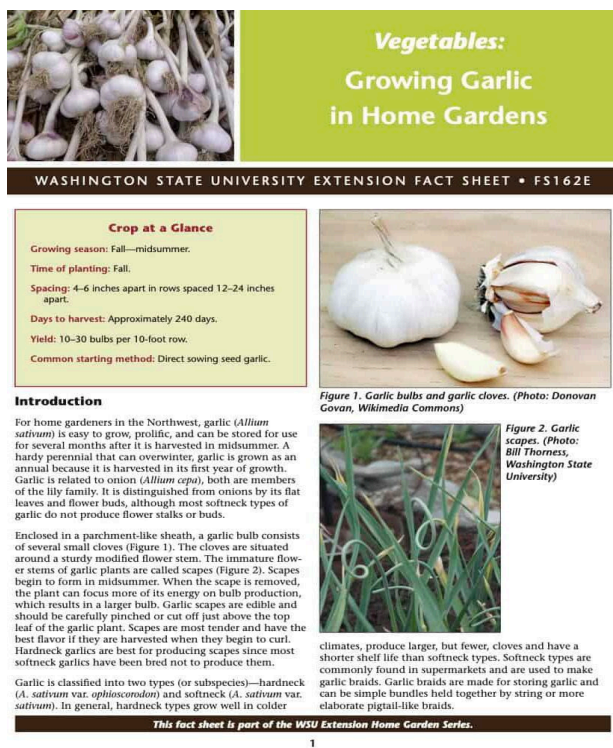


Gearing Up for Garlic Planting Season *A Few Tips to Ensure a Successful Harvest Next Year*

By Laura Kuhn, Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener

As our long days of summer wane, now is the time to consider if garlic is a contender for your garden space. For many Pacific Northwest gardeners, garlic (*Allium sativum*) is a staple crop. Washington state is well known for its commercial garlic production as the climate is suitable for growing a variety of garlic types. And, thankfully, garlic is simple to grow, easy to harvest, and stores for many months.

For those gardeners who want to have more information about growing garlic, many online sources accurately capture information about the types of garlic, planting methods, and related information. The [Washington State University Extension fact sheet \(# FS162E\) Vegetables: Growing Garlic in Home Gardens](#) discusses types of garlic, planting sites, pest management, common problems, as well as tips for harvesting and storage. To supplement the information found in this free fact sheet, here we will focus on specific tips related to local sources for buying garlic for planting, selecting where to plant, and preparing your beds for planting.



Above Left: The WSU Extension fact sheet discusses types of garlic, planting sites, pest management, common problems, as well as tips for harvesting and storage. **Above Right:** A single row of garlic in a raised bed. Photo © Laura Kuhn

Sourcing Garlic to Plant —

Local sources for finding quality garlic to grow in your garden

When shopping for garlic seed, you will notice a distinct difference between the garlic you see in the grocery store and that sold for planting—namely, the price. Garlic seed is more expensive than culinary garlic. Many home gardeners are tempted to plant culinary garlic for this reason; however, this is not recommended. Culinary garlic can introduce disease into your garden. Grocery store garlic typically lacks much information, if any, on where it is from, the variety of garlic that it is, and therefore its suitability for planting in your climate. Purchasing garlic seed allows you to know all these things, which helps to ensure the most successful harvest next year.

“Seed garlic” is for planting and sells by weight as full bulbs. An individual “seed” is what chefs refer to as a clove. Once planted, a clove or seed will grow into a bulb of garlic, which has multiple cloves. Many online sources sell garlic in the early summer for shipment in the late summer or early fall, depending on the climate zone and the type of garlic you buy. There are several sources for garlic seed online right here in Washington. Online pre-sales often lead to sold-out stock by planting time. The good news is that even if your favorite online seed source sells out, there are locally sourced garlic seeds to plant.



Above Left: A harvest of Music hardneck garlic. Photo © Laura Kuhn. **Above Right:** Two bulbs of garlic, same variety. Plant the seed from the larger bulb on the left. The larger the seed garlic, the larger the resulting bulb. Photo © Laura Kuhn.

The top sources include your local co-operative markets, garden centers, farmers market, or gardening enthusiasts you already know. When shopping at your farmers markets, ask about the garlic they sell, where they grew it, and the qualities of the varieties they carry. Talk to staff at the co-operative or garden centers, and ask the same questions. A final and often overlooked source is your gardening community or neighbors who already have a stash of garlic seed ready to plant from this summer's harvest.

The biggest consideration in selecting varieties (besides compatibility with your growing conditions) is to ask yourself how you plan to use the garlic. This question helps you refine your choices and determine whether to choose hardneck or softneck garlic. Another consideration is the level of garlic flavor or spiciness. The mildest form of "garlic" is known as elephant garlic, which is an onion. This type produces exceptionally large cloves in a huge bulb.

The Pacific Northwest is particularly suited to growing hardneck varieties that generate a tasty scape in June. (A scape is the flower stalk of the garlic). If removed when the flower head points downward, the plant will focus on bulb development, making for a larger bulb. Scapes are also tasty to eat and can enhance any culinary dishes that call for a garlic flavor. Hardneck varieties also have large cloves that are easy to clean and use for cooking. Softneck garlic is a crop that produces smaller cloves without a scape. Softnecks offer a longer storage life and the potential for creating a garlic braid.

A final word on selecting your garlic—bigger is better. When picking amongst various garlic bulbs, select the largest bulbs you can find. The larger the garlic seed planted, the larger the bulb it will produce. Larger cloves of garlic are easy to peel and use in recipes.



Above: Garlic seed or cloves. Top Row (left to right): Hardneck elephant garlic; Magic, Georgian Fire, German Porcelain, Blanak, Chinese Red/White, and Vincent. Bottom Row (left to right): Softneck; Sicilian, Inchellium Red, Messidor. Photo © Laura Kuhn.

Selecting and Preparing Garden Beds for Garlic

Once you are ready to grow garlic, September and October are the best months to prepare the beds. Select a spot that will receive full sun (minimum of 6-8 hours a day) and has good drainage (too much moisture and the seed will rot).

Alliums are a crop that requires rotation to reduce the potential for problems like rust. Onions, leeks, or garlic should not be planted in the same location for three years. Rotating crops can avoid certain diseases and viruses that linger in your soil. Rust (*Puccinia allii*) is a problem particular to the Pacific Northwest, where higher rates of humidity are present. Rotating crop locations helps to alleviate the problem; however, other tactics can be used in combination with rotation.

Spacing of seed is typically four to six inches, with a minimum of 12 inches between planting rows. Spacing out your garlic seed to increase air flow can help, so use the widest spacing possible. Using a single row of garlic as a border around a planting bed can allow for interplanting other crops. When it comes time to harvest your garlic in July, pulling the garlic will not affect the plants nearby. If you end up doing multiple rows of garlic in one area, wider spacing (such as 18 or more inches) will improve air flow. Given the high amount of precipitation in our area, it may be impossible to avoid rust altogether. Rust certainly looks bad, but it does not affect the garlic crop itself. When removing the stalks after harvest, be careful not to spread rust spores.

Garlic is a root crop that grows underground, and like all alliums, is a heavy feeder. Preparing your beds to create workable soil supplemented with organic matter takes a bit of work. Root crops require the soil to be loose to allow for bulb formation. Working compost into the soil helps loosen the soil and adds nutrients.

Local sources of compost include your local garden and landscape supply centers. Using organic compost is particularly important for garden beds that will grow plants that you will eat. Since your garlic will grow through winter, mulching your beds to protect from erosion is important to retain topsoil. If you mulch with compost after planting, remember to consider this in the overall depth of seed planting.

A cost-effective way to promote soil health and nutrition is to add composted manure to your beds. Using bagged organic compost from a garden center is costly unless you can generate your own. If not, look for a local farmer in your area who can provide a responsible and clean source of composted manure. Ask about the use of herbicides and pesticides before taking home any farm products to ensure you do not add unwanted chemicals to your soil. Work the compost into the top six inches of soil to create the perfect environment for planting your garlic seed. You can mulch with composted manure as well.

This Month in Your Garden



- September -

- Prune bamboo culms to thin your bamboo. Prune older (without sheaths), leaning, or damaged culms and cut them close to the ground. Prune any culms encroaching into an undesired area, and don't forget root pruning to contain your grove.
- Stop dead-heading your roses and allow them to begin developing rose hips. The shortening hours of sunlight, along with allowing the rose hips to develop, lets the rose bush know it has done its job of making seed and can now prepare for dormancy. Remove wilted petals and any leaves with black spot, rust or mildew to keep any developing fungus away from plant.
- Deadhead perennials that self-seed, such as calla lilies, Shasta daisy, and crocosmia to prevent propagation.



Above Left: A recently cured harvest of garlic, graded by size. Next year's crop will come from the bulbs on the left because they are larger. **Above Right:** Garlic infected with rust. Photos © Laura Kuhn.

Once your beds are ready, plant your seed and add your mulch. The best time to plant is in late October, but earlier and later can work, or even planting in the spring. Spring garlic will be much smaller in size than fall-planted garlic. You will get to see your garlic tops come up in early spring for a spectacular harvest come summertime. Adding garlic to your collection or trying new varieties can spark some great culinary experiences next year.



At Left:

Locally sourced, clean composted manure from Valleyview Farm Stand near Big Lake, WA. Photo courtesy of Linda Lanting, Valleyview Farmstand.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES :

- Martini, N. (2025) *Vegetables: Growing Garlic in Home Gardens*. WSU Extension Fact Sheet #FS162E Retrieved at: <https://www.skagitmg.org/wp-content/uploads/Public-Pages/Food%20Gardening/Food%20Gardening%20Library/WSU%20Bulletin%20FS162E%20Garlic.pdf>
- Hodges, L. (2013) *Garlic Production in the Home Garden*. University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Extension Publication G2221
- Page-Mann, P. (2019) *Six Mistakes to Avoid When Planting Garlic and Shallots*. Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Small Farms Quarterly, October 2019

- Oregon State University, Pacific Northwest Pest Management
website: <https://pnwhandbooks.org/plantdisease/host-disease/garlic-allium-sativum-rust>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Laura is new to the Skagit Valley but has more than 30 years of experience growing in coastal, inland valley, and desert climates. She had fun trying to grow herbs while traveling full-time in an RV. Laura is a 2023 graduate of the Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener program.

Questions about home gardening or becoming a master gardener may be directed to Skagit County WSU Extension Office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A, Burlington, WA 98233; by phone: 360-428-4270; or via the website: www.skagit.wsu.edu/mg

Washington State University Extension helps people develop leadership skills and use research-based knowledge to improve economic status and quality of life. Cooperating agencies: Washington State University, US Department of Agriculture, and Skagit County. Extension programs and policies are available to all without discrimination. To request disability accommodations contact us at least ten days in advance.