GROWING YOUR OWN GARLIC

Now is the time to get your garden ready for great garlic that you will enjoy next summer. And, the garlic that you grow will have much more flavor than anything you can buy at your grocery store. I just received my bulbs to plant in my raised bed garden, so I needed to do some research and referred to an article written by John Hanselman who was in Brown County’s first OSUE Master Gardener Training class.

John recommends that in Ohio you’ll want to use stiffneck varieties which are planted in the fall. You can order your seed garlic on the Internet or from a local Nursery (if they carry garlic). You can’t use the garlic that you purchase at the grocery store!

When you receive your garlic from your source, store it in a cool dry place unless you are planting immediately. Do not refrigerate. Leave the outer skin on the bulb and do not separate the cloves until you’re ready to plant.

Spend time preparing your soil. Garlic is a heavy feeder so to grow big bulbs you will need fertile soil. High humus content and good drainage are important so you may want to add compost. Full sun is best. If your planting bed doesn’t drain well the garlic plant base and roots will rot. Often the easiest solution to address this dilemma is to use raised beds for raising garlic. This above ground level bed allows for excellent drainage and the soil tends to heat up quicker in the spring, which means that the developing garlic plants will begin to grow again.

Plant garlic from the first fall frost until as late as November. The idea is to get good root growth but no top growth before winter. Plant individual cloves approximately six inches apart. Push the clove, root end down, about 1 – 2 inches into the soil, or place cloves in a furrow and cover with 2 inches of soil. Setting the cloves in an upright position when planting ensures a straight neck. Be sure to allow 18 – 30 inches between the rows. Mulch with hay, straw or leaves to a depth of 4 – 6 inches after the soil has frozen or in late fall.

In the spring, remove mulch and top dress with compost or complete fertilizer, or, if you fertilized well in the fall, leave the mulch in place. Garlic does not do well in competition with weeds, so keep your bed well weeded.

Stiffneck garlic varieties should be topped in early summer. A hard round stem called a “scape” will grow upward, and a topset will begin to form. Cut or clip off the young, green topsets with a few inches of the scape. These scapes are excellent sautéed and added to any number of dishes, especially stir-fries. If you do not cut off the scapes your bulb size will be greatly reduced.

Harvest in summer when the bottom leaves are beginning to yellow and before more than one or two leaves turn brown which in southwest Ohio should be in June to mid-July. Do not leave garlic in the ground too long or the bulbs will begin to separate and rot. Dig with a spading fork being careful not to bruise the bulbs.
Good curing is important to prevent decay during storage. Cure in a warm, shady place with good air movement. Hang in bundles or spread as a single layer on screens or drying racks. Allow to dry until the neck is dry and the outer skin is papery (approximately 2 – 3 weeks). Store by cutting off tops and placing bulbs in a mesh bag or open container. Keep in a cool, dry place, but not the refrigerator.

We continue to harvest tomatoes, green beans, and squash from the garden. I have pulled a few radishes that are coming on and I have squash and cucumber plants that are ready to bloom. My second planting of green beans is getting ready to bloom and the lettuce and swiss chard will be ready in a few weeks. I transplanted some Bok Choy starts and I am hoping that we have a late frost this year! If I were still gardening the “old” way, I am sure I would have mowed down part of the garden by now! How is your harvest coming along?