

Fruit and Vegetable Guide Series: Garlic

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) has an extensive history, with the earliest evidence showing it grew in Asia nearly 5,000 years ago. The Egyptians used it as a dietary supplement to aid the workers who built the pyramids. The Romans and Greeks used garlic for various medicinal benefits to help improve strength and endurance. During World Wars I and II, it was used to treat wounds. Garlic is known for its ability to heal and boost a person's immune system. Part of the onion family, this bulb-shaped vegetable consists of many cloves, which can be peeled off and used to enhance food, much like an herb or spice.

Utah Local Fresh Season

Garlic is a perennial that grows best in full sun and well-drained soil. It should be planted in the fall, nurtured in the spring, and harvested in late summer. For more information and tips for growing and harvesting garlic, visit: <https://extension.usu.edu/yardandgarden/research/garlic-in-the-garden>

Availability

Garlic is available year-round and is often found at most local grocery stores.

Selecting

There are several types of garlic, but most come from two main families, softneck and hardneck. There are certain benefits to each type. Softneck garlic often produces cloves that are smaller but more numerous, while hardneck produces fewer cloves, but they are bigger. To choose the best garlic, search for bulbs that are firm to the touch. The more solid, the better. The skin on the outside should be white or off white and should not be too dry or peeling excessively. If you see green shoots, also known as germ, inside the garlic, this often indicates that it is older, and while it is still okay to eat, it will have a bitter taste. Searching for the bulb with larger, plump cloves usually makes them easier to peel and use. The fresher the garlic is, the stronger the smell. It is likely an older bulb if there isn't a distinct garlic smell.

Cleaning and Preparing

Garlic is protected with its outer skin; however, if there is excess dirt, rinsing briefly may be necessary, but make sure to let it dry before using. Garlic cloves may be difficult to release from the bulb. However, placing the garlic bulb root-side down on a cutting board and pressing firmly with the palm of your hand should separate the cloves from the bulb. Once separated, the easiest way to release the garlic clove from the outer skin is by placing a clove under the side of a knife blade and pressing down until the skin loosens and the clove is released. Garlic can be used whole, or it can be prepared for cooking in three main ways:

1. **Minced:** Mincing maintains a strong garlic flavor
2. **Sliced:** Sliced garlic has a milder flavor but is great for different methods of cooking.
3. **Grated:** When you grate garlic, you get an intense garlic flavor perfect for marinades or dips.

Eating/Cooking

Garlic has a very distinct, strong taste. However, it is very versatile. Here is a list of ways that you can cook and eat garlic.

- **Raw:** Garlic can be eaten raw for a strong flavor. It is often minced or crushed and added to salad dressings, dips, or sauces.
- **Sliced:** Slicing garlic thin and then adding it to dishes such as salads or blending it into sauces can help enhance those dishes without overpowering them.
- **Cooked:** When garlic is cooked, it helps mellow the strong flavor and adds a subtle sweetness to a dish.
- **Sautéing:** When you sauté garlic in oil, it enhances the aroma of the garlic that adds depth to meals such as pasta, stir-fries, and vegetables.
- **Roasting:** Roasting garlic transforms it into a sweet, creamy spread with a caramelized flavor. This method of cooking is great on toast or mixing it in with mashed potatoes.
- **Baked:** You can incorporate garlic into baking as well. Baking garlic into items such as garlic bread or garlic knots provides a unique taste that's both savory and comforting, not to mention delicious.

The versatility of garlic is almost endless. You can add it to sauces, soups, stews, and casseroles to help enhance the flavor of almost any dish.

Storing

There are several different methods to consider when storing garlic. If you eat garlic quickly, storing a piece of whole softneck garlic on your counter at room temperature will likely last about 6 months. If the garlic cloves are separated from the head, then the cloves will only last a couple of weeks. If you don't eat garlic right away, and would like it to last a bit longer, ideal temperatures are between 32-38°F when the garlic is still whole, with little humidity (less than 70%). Garlic often sprouts quickly when temperatures are between 40-60°F. The ideal storage for garlic is in a paper bag whole; however, it can be stored longer in a plastic mesh bag. If stored in these ideal conditions, soft-neck garlic can be stored for up to 9 months. Other forms of garlic are less reliable in storage, but under ideal conditions, hardneck garlic can be stored for up to 6 months.

Nutrition Highlights

While garlic is low in calories, it is rich in essential minerals such as phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, zinc, calcium, and iron. Other key nutrients in garlic include B vitamins such as folate, thiamine, niacin, and B-6. Vitamins C, A, and K are also nutrients in garlic. Garlic is also one of the only known dietary sources of allicin, which is associated with the improvement of cognitive function, has significant antioxidant effects, improves cardiovascular health, and can help regulate the immune system.

Preserving

Garlic can be frozen; however, if not tightly wrapped, the flavor might seep into other foods. Freezing garlic also reduces the flavor and often changes the texture, so it isn't typically recommended.

Drying garlic is a common method to produce garlic powder and garlic salt. Just separate and peel the cloves and slice them into ¼ inch slices. Then, place garlic on a drying tray and dry at 140°F for 2-3 hours, or until crisp. Then, blend until it is fine. For garlic salt, add 4 parts salt to 1 part garlic powder and blend for only a few seconds.

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