

## *Some Notes on Growing Garlic*

By Vincent Leyden

### Garlic Types

There are many varieties of garlic, but they can be categorised into two types: Softneck and Hardneck. In general, Softneck Garlic is milder and will store longer (8-10 months) while Hardneck Garlic is more pungent, but will store only 4-6 months. Hardnecks can handle frost, while Softnecks are more appropriate for warmer climates. Here in the Kiola/Bawley Point area we can successfully grow both.

### Soil Preparation

Garlic is best grown in beds that have recently grown fruiting crops (i.e. pumpkins, tomatoes, zucchini, etc.), so it's a perfect autumn crop to follow your summer favourites. I prepare the beds by dressing with compost, horse manure and seaweed. I'm sure that other manures or blood and bone would work equally as well, but I would stress the addition of seaweed or any comparable liquid seaweed product. Seaweed contains trace elements which, I believe, lead to very tasty garlic. Make sure your bed is raised or is in well-drained soil.

### Planting

Garlic should be planted in autumn, but the exact month depends on where you live, as garlic is sensitive to soil temperature and will wait until the temperature starts to cool down. In our area I have tried plantings from April through to the shortest day in June, and have found the April/May plantings to be the most successful. I plant my Hardnecks (Oriental Purple and Rocombole White) on, or just after, the full moon in April. I plant my Softneck variety (sourced from Canberra) on, or just after, the full moon in May. The result of this is that my harvest is staggered and I will have stored garlic for longer, due to the later harvest and longer storage of the Softneck variety.

To plant, break the bulb into its individual cloves and plant them pointy-end up 3-5cm deep and 10cm apart. Rows should be 10cm apart.

### Tending

In a few weeks green shoots will appear, and these leaves will continue to grow throughout, with the outer leaves maturing and dying off as new leaves spring from the centre. This is a good time to heavily mulch between the plants, as garlic does not like too much competition from weeds. An additional benefit of the mulch is that it will aid in water retention, which is important to garlic because it likes to be well-watered for the first five months of its six-month life cycle.

I feed my garlic with a *light* application of seaweed compost once a week for the first five months. I believe in *light, frequent* feedings, but you may decide to feed your crop once a month with a slightly heavier feed. Garlic is an undemanding crop, so you could plant it and forget it, but regular watering and feeding will produce plumper and juicier cloves.

### Harvesting

I have found that the garlic will be ready to harvest six months after it is planted. For the last month you can just ignore it...no feeding and no watering. This allows the ground to start to dry off, thus ensuring that the leaves will dry and form the papery, protective outer layer which is vital to storage.

The garlic will note the transition from the cool, short days of winter to the longer, warmer days of spring and will then begin bulb formation. Not watering during the last month will not affect this process.

When the fifth and sixth leaves (as you count from the centre leaf) have brown tips on 90 % of your crop you will know it's time to harvest. As I stated before, this will be six months from the date of planting. Don't wait for the leaves to totally brown off as this will mean you'll lose the protective covering on the garlic, thus decreasing the storage time.

After digging/pulling my garlic I like to wrap ten bulbs into a bunch (leaves and all) and then hang in a dry and cool position for 4-6 weeks. I hang my garlic in an open-aired shed, so it might not take yours so long to properly dry in a garage or on a porch. With a bit of trimming, the same bunches can then be hung in a cool, dark pantry ensure maximum storage time.