

Spring garlic can be planted quite early in the season. There are two main types of garlic. 'Soft neck' which do not develop a flowering stalk or 'scape'; and 'Hard neck', which produces the much sought-after 'scape'. Soft neck garlic is used to make the garlic braids that are popular, it is also the variety most often found in regular grocery stores. Spring garlic is planted in the Spring and harvested that Fall. Traditional garlic is planted in the Fall, and harvested the following Fall.

For true garlic lovers, the garlic that is planted in the Fall, and harvested the following year is preferred. This is not possible for some gardeners however, so the Spring variety is a popular choice, and it is easy to grow. You may not get good results by planting the cloves from grocery-store-bought garlic. These bulbs are often treated to retard sprouting, and it may be up to a year old. Purchase garlic bulbs from a seed catalogue or garden center. Gently pry the individual cloves from the bulb, being careful not to damage the root end. Do not peel the cloves. Plant the cloves with the 'pointy' end up, so the tip is buried below soil level (Spring). Generally, the larger cloves will grow into larger bulbs by harvest time.

Gourmet, (hard-neck) garlic is planted in the Fall, (2 inches (5 cm) deep) about three weeks before the ground starts to freeze, so that the roots can start to develop, but the tops do not break the soil surface before winter. Garlic prefers a soil that is only slightly acidic (pH 6, 6.5), and is amended with compost and/or a low nitrogen fertilizer in the Fall. Some advocate side-dressing with a higher nitrogen fertilizer after the garlic is up and growing. Garlic is generally mulched for the winter. Garlic does not like repeated freezing and thawing, and frost heaves can tear young roots from the cloves.

Asparagus is a perennial vegetable, (and usually does not produce edible size spears until the roots are at least three years old) and therefore needs to be grown in a location that will not be turned over, roto-tilled, or otherwise disturbed. Asparagus likes only slightly acidic soil (pH 6-6.5). Before planting, seeds should be soaked for 48 hours in warm water. Germination can be sporadic and spread over several weeks. Purchasing young asparagus plants to transplant into your garden can be an option. Establishing an 'asparagus patch' is one way to go, (including rhubarb or strawberries in this patch is not uncommon), another, (especially if you are not growing a lot of asparagus) is to plant this vegetable in your perennial flower bed. Try to mark its' location during the first few years, as it is hard to spot early in the Spring while the emerging shoots are still very spindly. By about the third year, the emerging spears are thicker and are unmistakable. This is also when you can usually start harvesting the spears for your table. Every year the emerging spears will be thicker and more abundant. Watch closely, the spears erupt from the soil, and grow very quickly. If you are not vigilant, the spears will have over-matured seemingly overnight.

Cut or snap spears off at ground level when they are 4-6 inches (10-15 cm) high, just before the scales at the tips begin to open. Continue harvesting until the emerging spears become thin and spindly. At this point, allow the shoots to grow into a bushy plant, which can reach 5-8 feet (2 m) high. These actually look very nice in a flower bed, and the fronds look great as a 'filler' for cut flower bouquets. Trimming the plant back to ground level when it browns in the Fall is a common practise, as is adding a layer of compost, and mulch with straw or leaves. The compost helps to re-energize the soil, by replenishing nutrients, ready for the Spring, while the mulch protects the roots (especially young roots) during the winter. Using a balanced fertilizer (10-10-10, 15-15-15) during the growing season can be beneficial.

Spring frosts will freeze any erupted spears if you have not protected them. The roots are still viable, just snap or cut off the frost damaged spear; the root system will produce more.

More at www.fallfair.info