

LOCAL GARLIC IS WORTH CELEBRATING

And it's ridiculously easy to grow yourself.



By LYNNE GOLDMAN

Years ago, I spent a delicious day visiting Gilroy, California, the self-proclaimed “Garlic Capital of the World.” More than 50 percent of the garlic cultivated in the United States is grown in this area, eighty miles south of San Francisco. So, when buying garlic in the supermarket, I’ve always assumed it came from California.

Lately, this isn’t the case. Most garlic you’ll find in supermarkets now comes from overseas, usually China. But I like my produce as fresh as possible

and with a carbon footprint that’s as small as practical. Fortunately, garlic is easy to grow in temperate climates and is readily available at local farmers markets. Garlic is also ridiculously easy to grow yourself.

Garlic belongs to the allium family and, like its cousins—onions, shallots, scallions—is a bulb, and thus best to plant in the fall.


“We plant it around mid-October,” says Jackie Hansen, who, with her family, works Promised Land Farm, a small acreage in Lower Makefield. In

this way the garlic gets a head start before the winter, she explains. In the spring, the garlic bulbs send green shoots out of the ground that curl around themselves. These shoots, called garlic scapes, appear briefly at area farmers markets and can be used just like garlic, cut up in a stir fry or for pesto.

About the middle of June, Hansen begins to harvest the garlic. Some of it, called green or fresh garlic, shows up at local farm markets. But the rest is cured, dried out in the hot summer weather to later become the familiar papery bulbs. Luckily for us, this local garlic is available from July through the fall months. If you store these bulbs in a cool, dry place, you'll have delicious garlic deep into the winter.

Garlic is also easy to grow in your backyard. Burpee—the seed company founded in 1876 in Bucks County—recommends planting garlic in mid-autumn in a sunny spot with well-drained soil. Plant unpeeled cloves, with the pointed end up and the blunt end down, about one to two deep and four to

six inches apart. Put about four inches of mulch, straw or grass clippings on top to protect it during the winter. In the spring, cut off any garlic scapes that appear so that all the garlic's energy goes into growing the bulbs below ground, not the green shoots above. Harvest in June and July when most of the leaves have turned brown, and lay out to dry for several weeks.

Note: You don't have to go to California for a garlic festival. Just north of the River Towns, on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware, the Easton Garlic Fest takes place every autumn. This year's festival is set for October 2-3. 

Lynne Goldman is the creator of Bucks County Taste and a regular contributor to River Towns.



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