



Is it or is it not a vegetable? Depends on how you use it and what parts you eat. Well, I'll get to that later, but first some botanical points of interest.

Botanically it is in the onion family, but differs noticeably from onions and leeks. Swollen leaves form an onion bulb, so you can peel away the layers of an onion, but not garlic. Each garlic clove is actually a swollen auxiliary bud and the papery covering is the remains of the leaf that gave rise to the bud.

Onions make flowers and reproduce sexually; garlic does not. (Elephant garlic is an exception, but is actually more leek than garlic). So how did we get all these different varieties of garlic with only vegetative reproduction or cloning? Garlic does bloom, but instead of producing seeds, the bloom heads form little bulbils that you can eat or plant. When you plant bulbils the first year they will grow into "rounders" – bulbs without cloves. The second year they will grow into normal bulbs with cloves.

To create an interesting edible garlic vegetable, plant the bulbils close together and harvest the garlic plants before they begin to form scapes and blossom heads. Green garlic has a wonderful mild flavor that can be eaten as a vegetable or incorporated into stir-fried or soup dishes – very gourmet! The blossom stalks or scapes can also be harvested and eaten leaving the plant to put all its energy into growing larger bulbs – about 30% larger without the scapes and blossoms.

### **Planting, Growing and Harvesting**

October is the prime time to plant here, but you can plant as late as December and expect a reasonable harvest. Garlic bulbs should have time to sprout and put down a good root system before soil temperatures cool enough to halt growth. However, garlic needs a cold chill to form bulbs with multiple cloves – no cold chill and you get solid bulbs or "rounders". If you plant in the spring (not advisable here) – cold chill your garlic in the refrigerator (40F) for 40 days to get normal bulb growth.

Soil needs to be rich in organic matter and well drained. You can add some slow release nitrogen fertilizer at planting time (soy bean meal) and can fertilize in early spring for larger bulbs, (fish emulsion or cotton seed meal) but do not fertilize after May 1<sup>st</sup> or when bulbs begin to form – promotes excess leaf growth at the expense of forming bulbs.

Garlic needs continuous soil moisture, but not a soggy soil. The equivalent of 1 inch of rain per week is recommended – except for two weeks prior to harvesting. So, when the foliage begins to brown, stop watering.

Harvest garlic when about half of the foliage is brown. Lift the bulbs out carefully. Washing the bulbs is only necessary if you have a heavy clay soil. Dry the bulbs in the shade overnight and clean of excess dirt before curing. Cure garlic in a single layers or woven into braids (soft necks only) for 10-14 days in the shade with good circulation. The bulbs will lose about 20% of their weight when fully cured. If you leave garlic in the ground too long, the cloves will separate in the bulbs making them hard to clean and reducing storage time.

Garlic has been a cultivated crop for at least 5,000 years and is rich in history and folklore. Much of the folklore and writings about garlic involve its use as a medicinal plant. Only in recent times, has it been cultivated and marketed as a vegetable as well as a culinary herb. At larger farmers markets both garlic scapes and green garlic are sold as high value vegetable crops, but locally you will need to grow your own.

### **References:**

[Garlic Production in New Mexico](#) – NMSU Extension Publication

[Garlic – Organic Production](#) – ATTRA Publication

[Garlic Seed Foundation](#) - an informed collection of growers and eaters

Sources of Garlic Seed

[Seeds of Change](#) – New Mexico

[Potato Garden](#) – Idaho (they specialize in potatoes, but produce and sell excellent garlic)

Good Gardening and Good Eating

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