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Heart Disease

For those with high blood pressure, garlic can be effective in keeping those numbers down. One study found garlic supplements were as effective as a widely-used prescription drug, Atenolol, in reducing blood pressure to a safe level. Garlic has high amounts of sulfur, which can help relax and widen the blood vessel walls to prevent hypertension.

Cholesterol

Garlic can reduce the risk of heart disease by reducing cholesterol levels, especially triglycerides and LDL cholesterol (the “bad” ones) and enhance the body’s ability to dissolve blood clots, which can cause heart attack and stroke.



Cancer

Medical researchers have found garlic contains dozens of organosulphur compounds that have anti-cancer properties. These compounds inhibit the growth and spread of cancer cells for cancers such as breast, prostate, colon, stomach, bladder and skin cancers.

One study at the University of North Carolina found that people who eat garlic regularly cut their risk of colorectal cancer by 65 percent. According to the National Cancer Institute, garlic use can reduce the risk of colon cancer by 50 percent, pancreatic cancer by 54 percent, prostate cancer by 50 percent and stomach cancer by 52 percent.

Bone Health

Garlic also can improve bone health, as it contains bone-healthy nutrients such as zinc, manganese and vitamin B6. Researchers found it helps form bone and connective tissue and improves calcium absorption.

The next step is to estimate how much seed garlic you will need. Almost all growers who sell seed garlic sell by the pound. In chapter one, you'll find the number of plants you can expect from a pound for each of the ten garlic types.

Next, calculate how many plants you want, based on your growing area and plant density. For example, a 200 square foot growing bed, planted at a 6" x 6" spacing, would require around 660 cloves.

If you want to plant that bed in a purple stripe variety, which is about 60 plants per pound, you would need about 11 pounds of seed garlic. For the same bed, planting a porcelain variety like Music would require 20 pounds of seed garlic. Although your cost of planting seed is higher for a porcelain garlic, the mature bulbs are quite large, and your harvest will be much larger and more profitable.

You'll find a list of garlic suppliers in chapter seven. Try to find a supplier that is growing in a climate similar to yours. That increases the likelihood that their seed stock will do well when planted.

When your order arrives, check for mold or disease. Reputable suppliers have their garlic tested to ensure it is disease-free. Store your seed bulbs whole in a cool place (but at least ten degrees above freezing), out of direct sunlight with good air circulation until planting time. If you are harvesting and saving your own garlic bulbs for seed stock, store the bulbs at 50-60 degrees F from the time you harvest them until planting time.

If you plant big cloves, you can expect big bulbs at harvest time. Don't forget this rule! Grade your bulbs at harvest time by size or weight, and save the largest for planting stock.

You should plant your seed cloves in the fall. This allows the garlic plant to establish a healthy root system. If you live in an area with cold winters, plant 2-3 weeks after the first frost. If you want to be precise about planting time, use a soil thermometer and wait til the soil temperature at a 4-inch depth is 50 degrees F. Hardneck varieties require "vernalization," a period of cold winter weather that allows the plant to go dormant. If the plants don't get a long enough period of vernalization, they will do poorly in the spring and produce smaller bulbs.

Fusarium

This disease causes the garlic bulbs or feeder roots to rot. It can be blown in with the wind, and can be difficult to detect, but a common sign is small brown lesions on the white garlic cloves. Like most other garlic diseases, the best way to control fusarium is to start with clean seed stock, create a healthy soil environment, and pull any suspicious plants. When you pull them, burn them to prevent disease from spreading. Where the disease is common, growers often dip their seed bulbs in a hydrogen peroxide solution to kill the fusarium. You can also dip any questionable bulbs in hydrogen peroxide at harvest time.

Healthy soil will produce healthy plants, so make sure your soil has plenty of worms – a sure sign of healthy soil. A soil test to insure adequate Ph, humus level and NPK can help too.

Garlic does not like heavy wet soil, so avoid it. Other growers have found a yearly rotation of growing areas helps to avoid disease problems. Don't rotate garlic directly into an onion or leek growing plot, as they are subject to the same diseases.



Thrips

The onion thrip and onion maggot are possible pests, but rotation usually works well in controlling them. There are several biological controls that work well if you have a serious infestation.

There is a predatory nematode which seeks out and destroys onion maggots, yet is harmless to you, your plants, worms and beneficial insects. Also, many growers have reported success using diatomaceous earth, dusting the area around the garlic plants in late Spring.

The onion thrip can be controlled by releasing Green Lacewing in your garlic patch. They devour aphids, mites, thrips, caterpillar eggs, and many more pests. By using biological disease and pest controls, you will be able to grow organically and get better prices for your garlic harvest. Most of these biological controls can be ordered from Arbico Organics, listed in the resource chapter.

A digging fork works best for harvesting garlic. Loosen up the plants with the fork, and pull by hand. If you're growing garlic in long rows, you can harvest using a tractor and a turning plow to speed up the process. Be gentle with your plants – rough handling in harvest will result in damaged bulbs and lower profits. After you've dug your plants, they should be sorted if you plan to braid them. Garlic braids bring premium prices, (Often double the bare bulb price) but braiding takes time to do well.

If you do braid a portion of your harvest, set aside the best bulbs to cure. Use a sharp knife to trim off the roots as close to the bulb as possible. Don't braid the garlic right after harvest, as the stalks will dry out and the braid will be too loose. Wait until the stalks have lost some moisture, but are still easy to braid. Each braid can contain from 8 to 14 bulbs.

The rest of your garlic that will not be braided should be trimmed in the field. Use a pair of SHARP pruning shears to trim off the roots close to the base, and the leaves just above the tip of the cloves. Try to avoid harvesting on a wet day, so your bulbs will be cleaner. On a dry day, a quick brushing with a stiff brush will usually do the trick. If you're harvesting bulbs on a sunny day, get the bulbs out of the sun immediately after digging.



Properly cured garlic will store well for many months. Check the varieties in chapter two to find specific storage times for each variety. Here's how to do it. The garlic braids and trimmed bulbs should be cured for a week or two – up to four weeks for elephant garlic. An ideal curing area is 60-70 degrees F, out of the sun, and well-ventilated.