

Garlic

"Tomatoes and oregano make it Italian; Wine and tarragon make it French; Sour cream makes it Russian; Lemon and cinnamon make it Greek; Soy sauce makes it Chinese; Garlic makes it good".

Alice May Brock quotes (American Author)

What folklore referred to as Camphor of the Poor, others called Stinking Rose, but call it what you will, garlic is an incredible herb and a rich, natural medicine. Inside each odorous clove is a unique combination of volatile oils, water soluble compounds, enzymes and other health giving constituents that make it much more than a tasteful addition to a whole range of dishes. Garlic lowers cholesterol, lowers high blood pressure, reduces blood clotting, reduces the incidence of certain cancers and fights infection. This humble herb is also rich in protein, vitamins A, B and C and the minerals calcium, selenium and iron.

Ancient populations absolutely adored garlic. The Egyptians use to swear on garlic in much the same way as people swear on the bible. King Tut's tomb was found to contain several bulbs of garlic scattered around the chambers. When Moses led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt around 1200BC, they complained of missing their favourite foods – fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.

The Greeks also had firm ideas about the virtues of garlic. Greek athletes would take copious amounts of garlic prior to competing. Greek soldiers consumed liberal amounts of garlic before going into battle, and it became customary for Greek midwives to hang garlic cloves in birthing rooms to ward off evil spirits. Hippocrates prescribed garlic for infections, wounds, cancer, leprosy, and digestive disorders. Dioscorides hailed its use for treating heart problems, and Pliny listed the plant in several remedies to treat conditions ranging from the common cold to epilepsy.

Garlic is a root plant and part of the *allium* family which also includes onions, leeks and chives. It comes in many varieties from the very small cloves to the large elephant garlic. It is easy to grow and can be grown year-round in mild climates. In cold climates, plant cloves in the ground about six weeks before the soil freezes, and harvest in late spring. Or grow it in deep pots under glass. Garlic is a good companion plant for other vegetables, discouraging pests and promoting healthy growth.

Beware when buying garlic bulbs to grow. Imported garlic is often treated with growth inhibitors (made from hormones and chemicals) and gamma irradiation to prevent it from sprouting. To ensure you have the best tasting, chemical free garlic that is sure to sprout when you plant it, buy organic bulbs readily available from many supermarkets.

"There is no such thing as a little garlic." - Arthur Baer

If you agree with garlic mad Arthur, you will love this recipe.

All Garlic Pickle

2 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
2 tsp chilli powder
2 tsp fennel seeds
1 tsp onion seeds (kalonji)
1 ½ tsp salt
1 tsp turmeric
500g garlic cloves, peeled
3 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp sesame oil
Juice of 1 lemon

Dry roast mustard and fenugreek seeds in a hot pan until aromatic, this will take about a minute. Remove immediately and cool. Grind seeds and combine with other spices and salt.

Fry garlic cloves in olive oil until starting to colour. Do not brown. Take off the heat, and add spice mixture, sesame oil and lemon juice. Stir until thoroughly combined.

Transfer pickle to a sterilised jar with a tight fitting lid. Store in a cool, dry place for up to 2 months.

Tip: Soak garlic cloves in very hot water for 2 minutes to make them easy to peel.



Italian purple garlic

Article by Kris Dhillon author of "The Curry Secret"
www.thecurrysecret.co.uk