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1190 OLD SALEM RD NE
ALBANY OR 97321
Phone: 800-422-3985
www.nicholsgardennursery.com

THE STORY OF NICHOLS ELEPHANT GARLIC



It was in 1941 when we first saw this large type garlic growing in a backyard near Scio, Oregon. This area is in the heart of the famed Willamette Valley and originally settled by people of Bohemian origin. Remember back in 1941 it was not considered good manners to have garlic on one's breath and its use was limited to mostly immigrants from the "Old Country". We did however, despite the prejudice that existed at the time against garlic, see that this garlic had an immense future. So we began to buy all of this large-type garlic we could find.

We finally were able to get 12 pounds of cloves and no more. It was from the planting of this small amount of large-type garlic that we established our Elephant Garlic business in the fall of 1941. Since then we have sold our large garlic in every state of the country, Australia, South Africa and several European and South American countries. How they got our name we do not know, but we had three inquiries from Russia over the course of years.

The origin of Elephant Garlic has had many conflicting stories. Let us set the record straight as to the name "Elephant Garlic". The name originated, here at Nichols Garden Nursery in 1953. Prior to this it was called Giant Garlic. From what we can determine, it first came to this country with the early immigrants of Czechoslovakia or Northern Yugoslavia. Although it is referred to as French Garlic, there is not a shred of evidence that any Elephant Garlic came from France. Most Horticultural authorities have referred to this scientific name (botanical) as *Allium Scordoprasum*. But now we have some recent botanical classifiers who have raised questions about this. As Luther Burbank having developed Elephant Garlic, this is absolutely incorrect. Nor is this garlic a hybrid as some nurseries advertise it.

Since 1941 when we planted our first crop of 12 pounds of garlic we have pursued a course of constant selection for hardiness, size and disease resistance. Any Elephant Garlic that does not meet our rigid standards of excellence is not used for propagation. Consequently there has been a continual up grading of our Elephant Garlic to where today the stock or Elephant Garlic is much superior to what it was in 1941 when we started in the business.

Elephant Garlic is hardy, disease resistant stock and we strongly recommend growing it organically without any poison sprays or chemicals.

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SOIL

Elephant garlic, indeed all garlic, appreciates well drained soil and will not grow in an area with any standing water during the winter months. Add well rotted compost or cow manure added to the soil to improve the texture and fertility. If you are rotating your garlic, plant a cover crop prior to planting time, either in fall or early spring. Some recommendations for a cover crop are clover, winter rye, alfalfa or vetch. If you are not rotating your garlic planting this season, then once garlic is harvested, plant a warm season cover crop such as buckwheat to incorporate organic matter back into your soil. Buckwheat is a quick maturing cover crop that grows only in warm weather so it is ideal to plant before garlic. When you work the cover crop into the soil, if you must till, do so only deep enough to turn under the cover crop. The same goes for working in compost and other soil amendments including fertilizer. Turn the soil just deep enough to work the material into the soil or if your soil is friable you may not need to till at all. The pH should be between 6.0 and 7.0 for best crops.

More and more gardeners are learning ways to feed the microbes living in the soil. Some of the methods include minimize plowing, tilling and digging and use organic mulches or compost on a regular basis during the growing season not just at planting time. Finally, always keep the soil covered with live crops or a mulch. When you are not growing a crop, sow a cover crop to feed the soil microbes. Both soil texture and fertility vastly improve. Thus you will have bigger and better yields of any crop including garlic.

Garlic, especially Elephant Garlic, needs not only well drained soil, but fertile soil as well. It is important to add organic fertilizer or well rotted compost or manure at planting time. In the spring when garlic begins to grow again, add more nutrients in the form of well rotted manure, compost or a liquid sea weed sprayed on the leaves is great. The more vigorous and healthy the leaf growth in the spring usually the bigger the bulbs and cloves will be at harvest.

HOW TO PLANT ELEPHANT GARLIC

Separate cloves and plant their blunt ends down so that the pointed ends are facing up. Plant the cloves 4-6 inches below the soil surface and space the cloves from 8 to 10 inches apart in the row. In colder regions plant 4-6" deep and add 4-6" of mulch over the top for added protection. Five pounds of Elephant Garlic will plant approximately a 60 foot row when cloves are spaced about 8 inches apart. Garlic with smaller cloves should be planted 2-4" deep and again, in colder regions of the country, mulched for added protection from deep freezes and to prevent the garlic from heaving.

The best time to plant Elephant as well as other garlic is in the fall. Fall planting can be done from the middle of September until the fifth of October in the colder areas of the country. In the southern states and localities where the climate is mild, garlic can be planted even as late as the beginning of December. The important point to remember about fall planting is that the Elephant Garlic must be planted early enough to make some root growth before severe cold weather of winter sets in. Once the bulbs have produced roots they can take several degrees of below freezing temperature and even several degrees of sub zero temperatures. In the extreme cold areas of the country like the northern part of the plain states bordering Canada, where there are prolonged periods of low sub zero temperatures, fall planting of Elephant Garlic is not recommended.

Garlic does not compete well with weeds. It is very important that you keep your garlic as weed free as possible, especially in the spring as it begins to grow. After you weed in the spring, mulch with well rotted compost to reduce weeds. It will not eliminate them but will greatly reduce the number of weeds that come up for the next weeding.

In spring as the garlic starts to grow pay particular attention to amount of rainfall or snow pack. If you have an unusually dry spring you will need to water the garlic. If garlic is stressed in spring as it is growing, the bulbs will be a lot smaller. If you do water discontinue irrigating in the early part of July in order to give the bulbs a chance to mature and the stalks to dry out. Also if the spring is above 85 degrees for a period or time, it can reduce the size of the garlic. Mulch to keep the soil as cool as possible.

Where Elephant Garlic is spring planted there will be a certain percentage of the crop that will produce round, solid, onion like bulbs, with no clove segments. These round bulbs, when replanted, will produce normal but extra large bulbs with bulb segments the following harvest. Under these conditions it means that it takes two seasons to develop bulbs with segments.

HARVESTING ELEPHANT GARLIC

There are many prior steps one must take before the actual harvest of Elephant garlic begins. In late spring the plants will send up a center stalk that will have a bud on the end. The buds should be snipped off as soon as they are discernable, otherwise; if they are allowed to develop, they will flower and produce seeds which will result in smaller garlic bulbs. Elephant Garlic, garlic for that matter, is ready to harvest when the majority of leaves and stalk becomes yellow and starts turning brown. If the soil is loose the garlic can be pulled out of the ground by the stalks. Otherwise, dig the garlic with a shovel or potato fork. Be careful, allow sufficient room between your digging implement and the bulb itself. A little practice and you will be able to dig any garlic without damaging the bulb. If your soil is wet, especially near harvest time, the stalks or leaves may not turn brown. The garlic should be dug a bit earlier or else the outer sheath often rots. Before digging the entire crop, check one or two bulbs. If there are 3-4 sheaths left on the garlic, it is time to dig. If allowed to go too long, garlic will split open in the ground.

Bring all dug garlic in out of the sun. Cut off the roots and stalks immediately. If you cut the roots off soon after digging it is easier to cut them and the bulbs dry faster. Spread the garlic out in a shaded area or shed and allow to dry 2 to 3 weeks depending on the weather. You can put the harvested garlic on wire mesh racks that are at least 2-3 inches off the floor. This just allows the garlic to dry faster. Check regularly.

If you intend to replant some of your garlic, sort out some of the best looking, biggest bulbs to replant for next season.

Once dry, peel off the dirty outer parchment layers. Garlic is now ready to store for winter use.

HOW TO STORE ELEPHANT GARLIC BULBS

Store the bulbs in open mesh bags or shallow bins with slat bottoms or wire mesh. This enables the garlic to be exposed to a good circulation of air. The room where the garlic is stored should be cool and dry. Check the bulbs every week or ten days for any damage that may occur during storage.