VEGETABLES · A SUNNY OUTDOOR POT WITH ROOM TO STAY THROUGH WINTER

Let's grow garlic.

Allium sativum

This plan is for **Bulb garlic (Allium sativum; not elephant garlic)**

Four cloves planted in fall. A small summer harvest.

16-inch-wide pot **4 cloves → up to 4 bulbs**

Before you start

Fall planting with a locally suitable variety; use a sheltered, draining pot and local winter protection. A warm indoor room will not replace the cold period.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 25, 2026 View sources

LIGHT

Lots of sun

Choose a spot with at least 6 hours of direct sun.

WATER

Even moisture in growth

Water a drying pot; ease off as the bulbs finish.

FEEDING

Feed in spring

Support early leaf growth; stop feeding as bulbs form.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ One frost-resistant pot, 16 inches wide and at least 12 inches deep, with drainage
- ✓ Fresh potting mix, a watering can, and straw or dry leaves for winter mulch
- ✓ 4 large healthy cloves from garlic sold for planting in your region

THE SOIL

Miracle-Gro Organic Potting Mix (US, SKU 78951430). Contains starter nutrients; follow the feeding instructions on your actual bag.

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

One pot. Here's the plan.

A sunny outdoor pot with room to stay through winter. Start with **planting cloves**.

THE POT

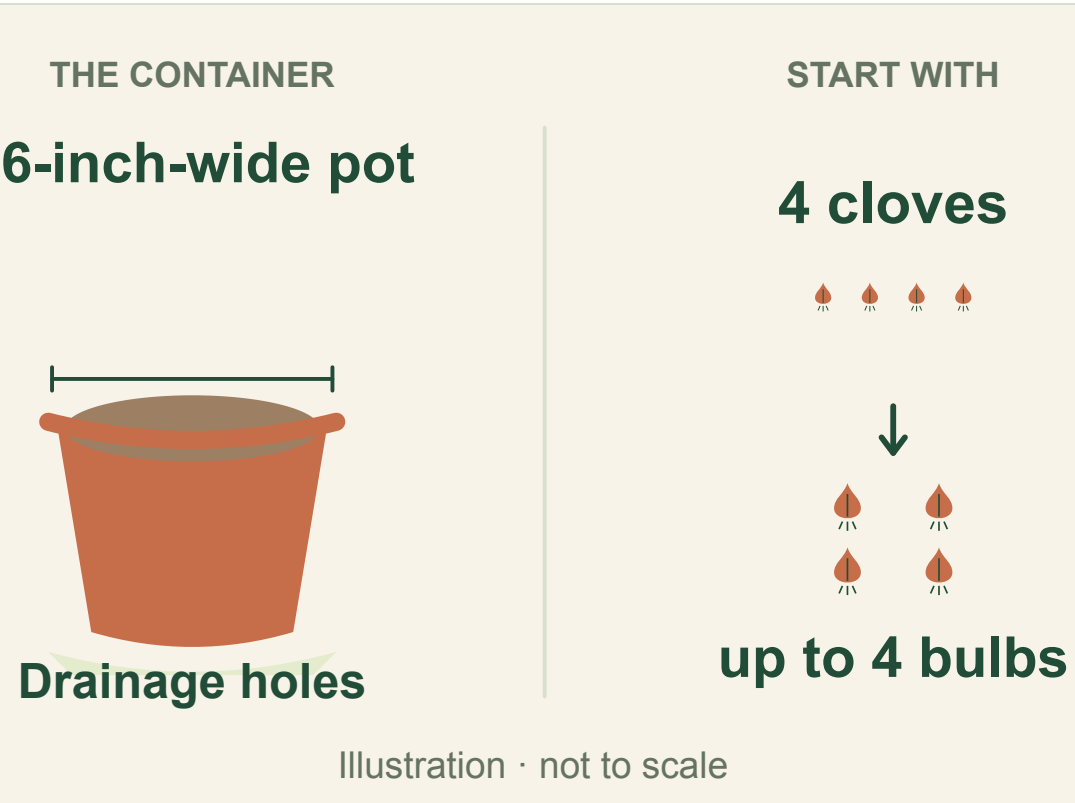
16-inch-wide pot

At least 12 inches deep, with drainage and a frost-resistant container.

HOW MANY

4 cloves → up to 4 bulbs

Use four firm, healthy Allium sativum planting cloves, 6 inches apart in a square. Elephant garlic needs a different plan.



16-inch-wide pot · 4 cloves → up to 4 bulbs At least 12 inches deep, with drainage and a frost-resistant container. Use four firm, healthy Allium sativum planting cloves, 6 inches apart in a square. Elephant garlic needs a different plan. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Buy locally suitable garlic

Choose a labeled planting variety from a reputable garlic grower or local nursery. Hardneck types suit cold winters; ask locally for an adapted softneck in a mild-winter area. Separate four cloves shortly before planting and keep their papery skins on. No pre-plant soaking is needed.

02

Plant four separate cloves

Fill the pot with damp mix. Arrange four planting spots in a square, 6 inches apart. Place each clove flat end down with its pointed tip 1 inch below the mix, then water gently.

03

Protect the pot through winter

Keep it cool outdoors with working drainage. In a cold-winter site, add 3–4 inches of loose straw or leaves and shelter the pot from drying wind. Mulch is not a guarantee against an exposed balcony freeze; use a garden bed if you cannot protect the container. Do not move it into a warm living room.

04

Grow leaves, then lift bulbs

In spring, check moisture and remove weeds by hand. Snip a hardneck scape when it starts curling. When lower leaves brown but about half the leaves remain green, loosen the mix and lift one bulb to check.

Help with the setup: drainage holes and saucers · potting mix vs. garden soil.

Other ways to start

Pick green garlic sooner

You can pull a young whole plant before it forms a mature bulb and use the tender stem and leaves. That plant will no longer produce a bulb; leave the others in place for the main harvest.

Use a garden bed in a very cold site

The same four cloves fit a small sunny bed at 6-inch spacing. Soil in a bed is less exposed than an elevated pot. Follow your local Extension planting depth and mulch advice; the pot fertilizer dose below does not apply to the bed.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

During growth, water as the top inch starts drying; drain. In winter, check unfrozen mix. Taper as bulbs mature; stop about 2 weeks before lifting.

FERTILIZER

Espoma Garden-tone (US 3-4-4)

AMOUNT

2 level tablespoons for the entire 16-inch pot

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

Dry granules: 16 ÷ 4 × 1½ teaspoons = 6 teaspoons. Share across all four plants; apply at the outer edge and water in.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

Monthly during early leaf growth, if needed.

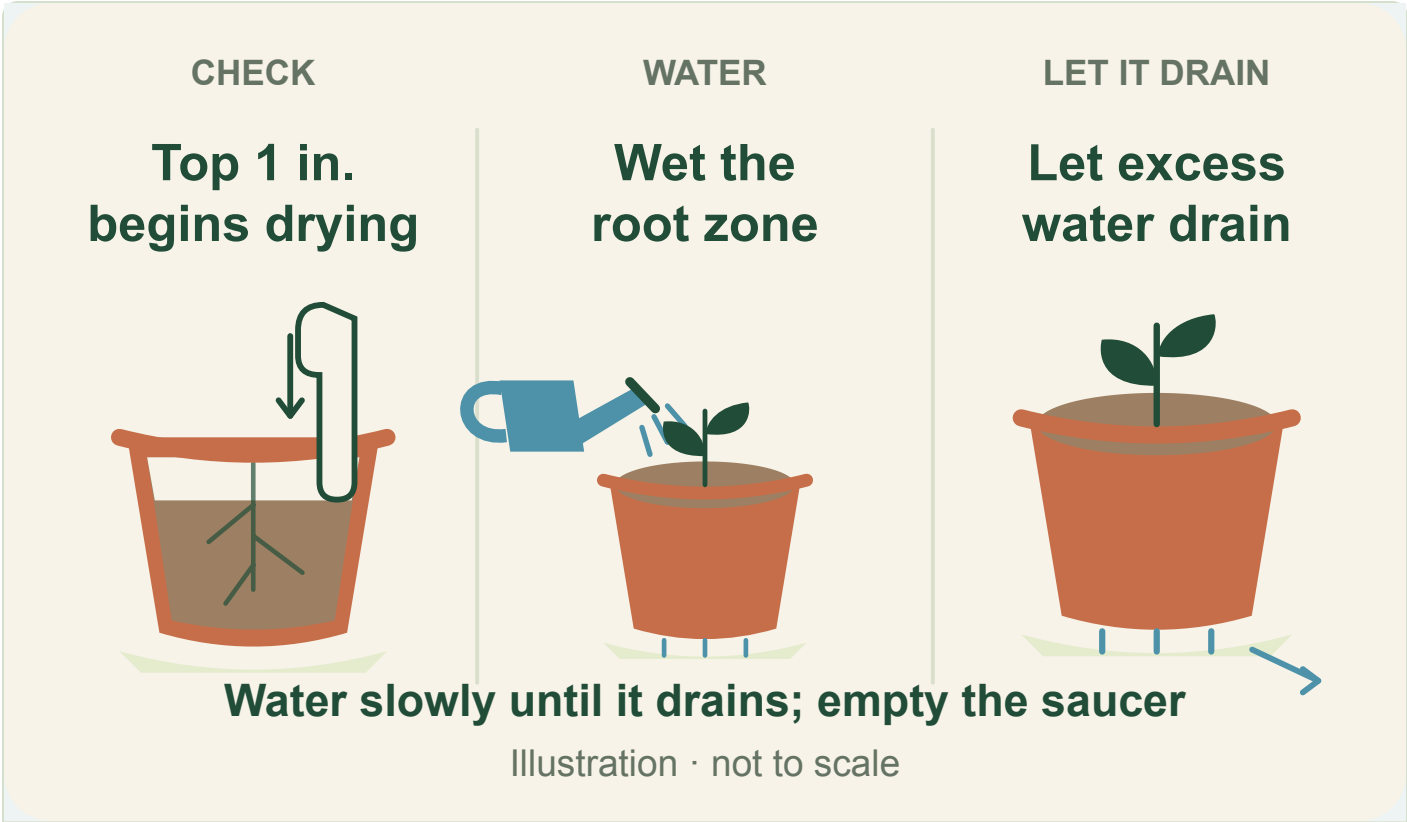
WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

Skip feed at planting. In spring, begin only after the bag's starter-feed period; stop as bulbs enlarge. Do not feed dormant, frozen, or waterlogged plants.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

Check the pot daily during active growth. Water when the top inch starts drying, letting the whole root zone become moist and excess drain. During winter, check when the mix is unfrozen and avoid keeping it wet. As bulbs mature, taper watering and stop about 2 weeks before lifting; shelter the pot from heavy rain if needed.



Check before watering. During growth, water as the top inch starts drying; drain. In winter, check unfrozen mix. Taper as bulbs mature; stop about 2 weeks before lifting. Original illustration; not to scale.

> **The easy rule**
>
> Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

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02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

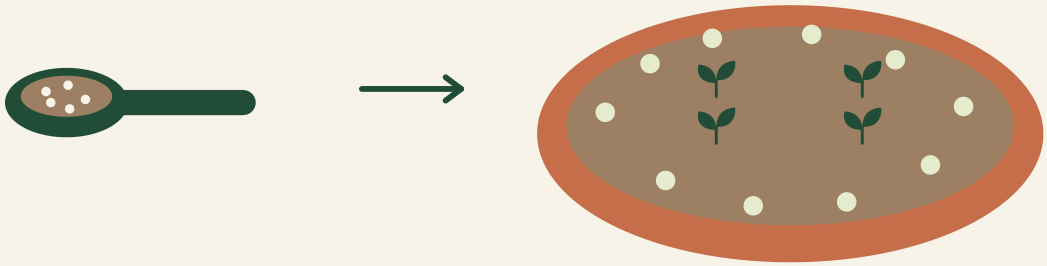
Add no extra fertilizer when planting in this pre-fertilized mix. Check its bag for feeding duration. Resume feeding only when spring leaves are actively growing and the starter feed is spent; do not feed dormant, frozen, or waterlogged plants.

MEASURE

2 level tbsp

SHARE ACROSS ONE CONTAINER

16-inch pot



Around the outer edge

Whole-pot dose · then water in

Illustration · not to scale

2 level tablespoons for the entire 16-inch pot Dry granules: 16 ÷ 4 × 1½ teaspoons = 6 teaspoons. Share across all four plants; apply at the outer edge and water in. Monthly during early leaf growth, if needed. Skip feed at planting. In spring, begin only after the bag's starter-feed period; stop as bulbs enlarge. Do not feed dormant, frozen, or waterlogged plants. Original illustration; not to scale.

US PRODUCT REFERENCE



Espoma Organic

Garden-tone

3-4-4

Granular: measure onto growing mix

Check the official US product ↗

Illustrated reference; check the manufacturer's current packaging and US label.

SPRING LEAF GROWTH ONLY

Espoma Organic Garden-tone (US 3-4-4 granules)

Use 2 level tablespoons of Garden-tone 3-4-4 for the whole 16-inch pot, shared by all four plants. Scatter near the outer edge, clear of the stems, and water in. The label calculation is 16 ÷ 4 × 1½ teaspoons = 6 teaspoons. If needed, repeat no sooner than a month later during early leaf growth. Stop as bulbs begin enlarging; do not keep feeding through summer just because the package lists a monthly schedule.

Check the manufacturer's product page ↗

These are dry granules, measured for the whole pot, not for each plant. Keep them off stems and leaves, then water in. Use the named US product and the directions on your bag.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

When to expect summer bulbs

Fall-planted cloves normally occupy the pot until the following summer. Each surviving clove can form one bulb, but size and timing depend on variety and conditions. Four plants are a small first project, not a household garlic supply.

Fall planting and winter protection

Plant in fall at the time recommended for your local garlic variety, before the ground stays frozen. Very warm-winter regions need suitable varieties and sometimes prechilled stock. In severe cold, a ground-level sheltered site or garden bed is easier than an exposed balcony pot.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

Something looking off?

Can I plant supermarket garlic?

It may sprout, but the variety may be poorly matched to your winter and it can carry disease. For a bulb harvest, buy healthy garlic sold as planting stock.

Why did I get one round bulb instead of cloves?

Insufficient chilling is one possible cause. Check the variety and planting season before adding fertilizer; feeding cannot replace the cold period that many varieties need.

Can I grow garlic from seed or a cut leaf?

This beginner plan uses individual cloves. A detached leaf will not make a new garlic plant. Seed and tiny bulbils are longer specialist projects.

How do I dry my harvest?

Leave the tops attached and cure the unwashed bulbs in a dry, airy, shaded place for 3–4 weeks. Once dry, trim the tops and roots. Use any damaged bulb first rather than storing it.

Is garlic safe for pets?

No. Garlic is toxic to cats and dogs. Keep cloves, leaves, and harvested bulbs away from pets that might eat them; contact a veterinarian if ingestion is suspected.

Clove spacing and keeping healthy leaves

Give four cloves room in the pot

Four cloves form a centered square with 6-inch sides. A 16-inch-wide, 12-inch-deep pot is our roomy adaptation of RHS container and spacing guidance. Plant the pointed tips 1 inch below the mix; depth is measured from the tip, not the clove's base. Colder local guidance can differ, especially for in-ground planting.

Leave healthy foliage for bulb growth

Leave healthy foliage on plants intended for bulb harvest. Hardneck flower stems are the optional edible extra; removing them is different from repeatedly cutting off the leaves.

Help with your next step.

Set up a pot that drains

Choose drainage holes and manage the saucer before you plant.

Read the fertilizer already in your mix

Check the actual bag before adding a second fertilizer program.

Compare four other edible starter pots

The chart covers spinach, basil, cherry tomato and blueberry. Use it to compare alternatives; their pot sizes and feeding recipes do not apply to this plant.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- University of Minnesota: garlic selection, growth, feeding stage, and harvest ↗
  https://extension.umn.edu/garden-and-home/yard-and-garden/gardening-in-minnesota/growing-garlic
- RHS: garlic container depth and clove spacing ↗
  https://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/garlic/grow-your-own
- Ask Extension: winter mulch for garlic in Minnesota grow bags ↗
  https://ask.extension.org/kb/faq.php?id=813062
- Espoma: Garden-tone formula and container amounts ↗
  https://www.espoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2020_EO_Garden-tone_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Manufacturer: starter feed in the named potting mix ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/potting-mix/miracle-gro-organic-potting-mix/78951430.html
- ASPCA: garlic and pets ↗
  https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/aspca-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants/garlic
- Manufacturer: US fertilizer formula and application directions ↗
  https://www.espoma.com/product/garden-tone/

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

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Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.