GARLIC, ONIONS, LEEKS AND SHALLOTS

GARLIC

Garlic is one of my favorite crops and so easy to grow. It is always grown by planting the individual cloves from late September until November for harvest the following summer. Spring planted garlic is unlikely to form cloves. There are two different types of garlic, soft neck and hard neck. Soft neck has several layers of many cloves and is what you find in the grocery store. The hard neck types produce large bulbs with few and very large cloves. This type puts up a stiff stalk in the center that should be removed when it starts to curl to direct the energy to growing large bulbs. Garlic requires a pH of 6.8 so you will probably need to add lime. It prefers well drained soil. Plant cloves on 5” centers and mulch to discourage weeds, wheat straw works well. Side dress with a balanced fertilizer in the early spring. Don’t water after first of June. Harvest when half the leaves show some yellowing, don’t leave in the ground too long or they will split their wrappers. Hang in a warm dry place with leaves intact to cure for about a month. Clip tops to 1” and trim roots. Store at around 60 degrees in a dark dry place. An out of the way closet in the house works well. Refrigeration will break dormancy and promote growth.

ONIONS

Onions want full sun. Raised beds with loose, rich, well limed soil is best. Plant on 6” centers for the biggest bulbs. Onions, green onions, leeks and shallots are easy to start from seed, plant early spring in deep pots for long healthy roots. Set grown onions are more prone to disease and a larger percentage will produce flower stalks. There are three different onion types; long day, short day and hybrid day neutrals. Short day onions grow in the south. In our latitude we need the long day type so the onions will make bulbs. Day neutral varieties, crosses of the two types, are not subject to day length and there are some wonderful varieties. Onions have shallow roots, they need to be kept well watered. Keep beds weed free but cultivate shallowly or mulch. Onions are relatively free of problems. You can harvest onions anytime. If you want to store them wait until half the onion tops have fallen over, bend the rest over and leave for a few days. Dig onions carefully keeping tops intact. Hang in a warm dry place to cure for a month or so. Cut tops to one inch and trim roots. Store cool and dry. Length of storage depends on the variety of onion. Onion maggots are the main local pests.

LEEEKS AND SHALLOTS

Shallots are expensive to buy at the market, but they are easy to grow. Starting them from seeds is easy and much more economical than sets. Set grown bulbs are more likely to bolt to seed and may carry disease. The shallot variety in the center is ‘Picador’, it is a hybrid developed to produce large single bulbs. Leeks should also be grown from seeds, there are hybrids and open pollinated varieties. Like onions, they need good fertility and water.

By Sally Reill