



How to grow BIG garlic.

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Garlic could be my favorite crop to grow. A bit of preparation, some early planning and effort, and its spring reward is a feeling of effortless accomplishment. Last year, I got serious and sourced a few pounds of my favorite variety, Music. [Fedco](#) [1] had sold out, and I found it at [Runaway Ranch](#) [2] in Michigan. I pledged that I'd plant enough to keep us eating garlic all year (*weneed* white pizza) and still have enough to plant this fall. Store-bought garlic can't compare.

I prepped a big bed at the bottom of the hillside by mixing in chicken manure and old hay by hand. The site, clayey soil just where the water drains downhill, meant I would rarely have to water it. I planted the bulbs, pointy side up, in the straightest rows I could manage—trenches, really. I blanketed them with eelgrass and seaweed and planned to top those with mulch hay. The hay never got there.

The shoots came up in spring, and despite the heavy soil, they seemed healthy and uniform. I don't think I ever fertilized them and only watered a few times that I can remember. We cut the scapes off of the upper section, and used them in a spring garlic scape carbonara we all love. I froze the ones we didn't use to start soups and stews now.

Here's where things went wrong: I left the scapes to flower on the lower half of the bed and admired the lovely, seedy globes. I could have sworn that gardeners were split on scapes—the fussy ones cut them in hopes of increasing bulb size, but other, experienced gardeners believed it didn't make much difference in the end. My experience proved otherwise. When it came time to harvest them, the bulbs from which we trimmed the scapes (on the left) were half again or even twice as plump as the bulbs we didn't trim (they're on the right). Lesson learned. Will not forget garlic 101: Harvest scapes + spring garlic carbonara = bigger bulbs.

All wasn't lost, though. I took some puny bulbs and those I'd knicked with my pitchfork—it wasn't easy to dig in the hill—and preserved them in olive oil. Gorgeous.

Image (optional):

