

Growing Bulb & Root Vegetables

Asparagus

Asparagus grows best in a sunny spot with well drained sandy or deep loam soil. Do not plant asparagus in area where corn has been planted the last two or three years or where a previous asparagus patch has grown. Add manure to the area you wish to plant asparagus in the fall before planting in the spring. Most gardeners find it easier to plant asparagus plants (crowns) than to grow it from seed. Plant the crowns in the spring about 6" to 8" deep and about 12" apart in rows. Rows should be about 4' to 5' apart. Do not harvest any asparagus the first year, the plants need to get established first. The second year only harvest for four weeks. After the third year do not harvest after June 15th. Harvest the stems by using a sharp pruners or snapping them off slightly above the soil. After the final harvest for the year leave the remaining asparagus tops up through the fall and winter, only cutting them back when spring arrives. Till in additional manure at this time also.

Potatoes

Potatoes prefer a fertile and acidic soil with a pH of 5.0 to 5.5 for growing. Applying a 10-10-10 fertilzier to the soil before growing should work for most gardens. We can recommend varieties that do well in Iowa. Grocery store potatoes have been treated so they do not sprout, so it is not reccomended to use these for planting. Before planting, slice the potato into "seed" pieces. Each piece should have several eyes on it. If the potatoes are small they can be left as whole pieces. Before planting treat the pieces with a fungicide or store at 65 degrees for one to two days. This allows them to heal over and makes them less resistant to fungus rot. Plant the pieces in early to mid April in Iowa. Plant the pieces 3" to 4" deep in furrows that are one foot apart. Rows should be 3' to 4' apart. Water once a week in dry weather but do not overwater, potatoes are prone to disease if they get too moist. Potatoes can be harvested when they tubers are small and the leaves of the plant are still green, these are called new potatoes. New potatoes have thin skin and will only remain fresh for about 10 days in refridgeration. Mature potatoes can be dug once the plant has died and the leaves are brown. Most potatoes are mature 90 to 120 days after planting. To test for maturity dig up a potato and rub its skin. If the skin falls off they still need to mature. Leave them in the the soil for a few days longer before harvesting. Store potatoes in a cool dark place. A 10 foot row of potato plants should produce 15 to 30 pounds of potatoes.

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Garlic

Garlic does not produce seeds so the cloves of garlic must be planted. We can recommend varieties that are hardy to Iowa. It is not recommended to plant cloves from the grocery store as they are commercially produced in warm climates and will not winter well in Iowa. Garlic cloves do best in well drained soil that is high in organic matter. Till the soil up in the area you wish to plant so it is nice and loose from the garlic to grow. Plant the garlic cloves in the late fall or early spring months. Put a layer of mulch over the bulbs if they are planted in the fall. Plant the cloves about one inch deep with the pointed side facing up. Place cloves 3" to 5" apart in rows that are spaced 18" apart. Garlic needs to be fertilized monthly with all all purpose fertilizer during the growing season. Water once per week during dry weather. Stop watering after July to allow the foliage to turn yellow and die off. After the foliage has started to die off (usually August or September) carefully harvest the garlic bulbs from the soil. Allow the bulbs to dry for 2 to 3 weeks in a well-ventilated area. Store them in a cool, dark place in a mesh bag. They should last 3 to 6 months.

Onions

Onions prefer a sunny spot with well drained, fertile, and acidic soil with high organic matter. Avoid heavier soils with clay unless the soil is amended. Before planting till in all purpose fertilizer 10-10-10 into the soil before planting, as onions require higher fertilization than some vegetables. Onion sets are the most common way to plant onions. Onion sets are small dormant bulbs that are planted in the spring months. Plant them 2" to 3" apart and about 2" deep, depending on the variety. Thin the plants to 3" to 4" apart as they grow. Space rows 12" to 15" apart. Water once per week during dry weather. About one month after planting apply an all purpose fertilizer to the onion plants. Green onions can typically be harvested about 30 days after planting. Storage onions (red, white, yellow) are harvested when the foliage falls over and turns brown. Typically 90 to 120 days after planting. After harvest cure the storage onions in a cool dry place that is well ventilated for about two weeks. After two weeks inspect for damage or decay and dispose of poor onions.

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