**Garlic Done My Way**

**Segment for Week of 27 September 2021 757-550-1854**

This is Pauline Milbourne bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. This week I will share with you a story from John McCormick, one of our Master Gardeners with a penchant for growing garlic.

It’s late September, and I have just finished cleaning out our two raised garden beds. Two 4 x 4 raised beds growing whatever veggies desired for two people seems enough for us. The beds have been in use for about 8 growing seasons and have been the homes for various vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and my favorite fall planting……. garlic!

Before getting into the nitty-gritty of growing garlic, let’s first consider some interesting “Fun Facts.” Garlic belongs to the Lily family, has some 450 different varieties, and originated in Central Asia. First cultivated 4,000 years ago, it is one of the oldest food flavors. Medically speaking, it is one of the healthiest foods on Earth. Besides all these great points, it is amazingly easy to grow!

The garlic that I have been planting came from Apalachin, New York where the winters can get very cold for long stretches and snow is a winter staple. I have been planting the descendants of the original plants for years and have enjoyed giving it to others to try to grow and, of course, eat.

And now it’s time to get to it! So, here’s how it’s done:

Prepare your planting bed by tilling the soil to get the lumps out. Prep the garlic by breaking them into single cloves. Don’t worry about removing the “skin.”

In the ground they go. I usually plant the cloves every 3-5 inches in rows 3-5 inches apart, pointed side up. Cover them with soil – no need to “tamp” down. Cover with 2-3 inches of mulch for winter protection. Note that I have not spoken about watering because I have never watered our garlic – ***ever***. Whatever rain occurs is what the garden gets, nothing more.

Next is the easy part. Wait to see what happens and, depending on the weather, you may see plants pushing through as early as two weeks after planting. Let them be. Weed if you must, but let them be. My experience tells me that they will sprout and may begin to grow to 3, even 4 inches tall, but once the cold hits they may flatten down and seem to rest. Growth will begin again sometime in mid-March. Wait to harvest until mid-summer when a few of the leaves have turned yellow. Once removed from the soil, hang them in a dry, shady area for a couple of weeks to cure. They are now ready to eat but be sure to save some of the best ones to plant the following year!

For answers to Gardening questions call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office.