



## Plants & Gastronomy

The people's choice

**Garlic**

*Allium sativum*

### Why it was chosen

Garlic is used from the Far East to Europe and Latin America. Its distinctive flavour adds depth to a wide range of savoury dishes.

We don't really associate garlic with traditional British cooking but the word is derived from the old English 'gar', meaning spear, and 'lac', meaning leek. Its use in mediaeval times was probably more herbal and medicinal than culinary.

### What it is

Garlic is a bulbous plant from the *Allium* family, which includes leeks, shallots and onions. It can be roasted whole, sliced, chopped, crushed or even eaten raw. The part that we eat is actually the swollen underground base of the leaves.

### Where it grows

Garlic is native to Central Asia.

Garlic grows in both cool and warm climates. If planted in the autumn, the cloves remain dormant throughout the winter and sprout in early spring.

Clay models of garlic have been discovered in Egyptian tombs, and six dried garlic bulbs were found in the tomb of Tutankhamen.

### Did you know?

Numerous studies have shown that garlic can lower cholesterol, which may be one reason why the Mediterranean diet is thought to be so healthy.

### What the scientists say

Garlic has a complex natural defence system. When garlic is injured, it produces allicin, a compound that protects it against insects and bacteria. Understanding the biochemistry of plants' natural defences, allows scientists to identify products that can be useful in a range of applications, from health products to natural pesticides.