



GARLIC

THE LAZY GARDENERS BEST FRIEND

STORY AND PHOTO BY JOHN HERSHEY

Wow, the summer just flew by, didn't it? It's always such a busy time here in Colorado, with all the great recreational opportunities. I can't believe the crisp fall days are here already. Everyone is settling into their normal autumn routines: The leaves are turning, the kids are back in school, the Broncos are building big early leads that they immediately squander after halftime.

And for the rest of us, you know what the arrival of fall means: It's time to start gardening!

I know that sounds crazy. And it is, by the conventional wisdom. It goes against everything we're taught, not just about successful gardening but about getting ahead in life: Get an early start, don't put it off until the last minute, work hard and be serious or you'll never amount to a row of pins. Or was it a hill of beans? I forget my grandmother's exact words.

In any case, the result is stressed-out people spending too much time at the office and stressed-out gardeners setting their tomato seedlings out too early, only to watch them shrivel in the inevitable late spring blizzard.

The lesson of the garden, which would do us good in life, is: Slow down, relax, there is a time for everything. Gardening, in other words, is a license to procrastinate. Getting an early start goes against the natural cycle.

It goes against human nature too. According to *Psychology Today* magazine, 20 percent of us describe ourselves as chronic procrastinators. (The other 80 percent didn't respond to the survey in time.) If you're in this category, you may have responded to all the buzz about local eating and sustainability by thinking: I'm going to plant a garden this year! Not today—I'm too busy at work. Maybe this weekend. Right after I get home from the golf course. And mow the lawn. And play with the kids. And watch the game. And that show where the people are trying to lose enough weight to get off an island and present a rose to David Hasselhoff or whatever. But definitely sometime.

If you're a world-class procrastinator like me, you may be realizing that you haven't quite gotten around to planting the garden yet. Maybe you think you're safely off the hook for this year. Not on my watch! Remember the fundamental rule of procrastination: After the long period of leisurely goofing off comes the brief but intense frenzy of activity. Being lazy all summer has been fun, but now it's crunch time. Remember your frame of mind at midnight before a paper was due and you hadn't started the research? That's the attitude you want to bring to the garden now.

Fortunately, there's a garden plant that puts a positive spin on this and all our other personality flaws: garlic. Garlic reassures us that

we're not lazy. We're just marching to our own drum. All the other vegetables get planted in the spring and harvested in the fall. Immune to this peer pressure, garlic does the opposite. When the other gardeners are frantically busy in early spring, we and our garlic are enjoying a biologically mandated "period of rest." And when we pull up our garlic bulbs next July, we still have plenty of time to plant leafy greens, zucchini and many herbs for a fall harvest. If we get around to it.

Fall is the perfect time to plant garlic. Ah, you're thinking, but then I'll have to spend countless hours weeding and tending the garlic patch. Nice try, but that excuse won't fly either. Garlic is the ideal crop for a neglectful gardener. Most of the crops we grow seem more desperate for attention than Donald Trump, but garlic grows quietly on its own. You stick the cloves in the ground in early November, throw down some mulch, and forget about them until spring, when the garlic bounds up like a Labrador puppy, eager to please you. Then you just water a few times, harvest in July, and hang the bulbs in a cool place to cure.

Garlic rewards this minimal effort with abundant culinary and health benefits. It tastes great in sauces, stir-fries, burritos, omelets, pesto, smoothies or any other dish. And it can be used to treat every known human ailment—with the possible exception of halitosis. We cure the garlic, and the garlic cures us.

It's a perfect symbiotic relationship. Especially if you're an insecure gardener like me. Garlic is not like those standoffish tomato vines, which will produce ripe fruit if they darn well feel like it, or the feisty basil, which bolts like a thoroughbred when the weather gets hot, long before we get around to making pesto. We cater to every whim of those temperamental garden divas so they will eventually toss us a little treat. But garlic needs us as much as we need it. This lazy plant has evolved so most common varieties don't bother to send up a seed stalk. It puts all its energy into growing a nice healthy bulb for us to

enjoy. But to go forth and multiply, the garlic needs someone to dig up the bulb and divide the cloves. That's our job.

So get to work already. With a little effort now, you'll have beautiful plants in your garden in the spring and plenty of delicious, healthy garlic through the summer and fall.

Or, if you want to put it off even longer, you can plant it early next spring.

If you grow...

Good mail-order sources of organic garlic for planting are Filaree Farm (filareefarm.com), Seeds of Change (seedsofchange.com) and the Colorado-based Garlic Store (thegarlicstore.com). If you procrastinate too long to order by mail, good planting garlic is available at some local garden centers. And if you don't even get around to that, just grab a few heads of organic garlic at Whole Foods and stick the bulbs in the ground. The Seeds of Change website has a good introduction to growing garlic, and the definitive guide is *Growing Great Garlic* by Ron Engeland, available from Filaree Farm.

John Hershey is an area procrastinator. To read more garden-variety humor, visit his website: www.rakishwit.com.