

Garlic touted as replacement for tobacco

Imports biggest challenge for garlic growers

Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Looking for a medicinal remedy to treat infections, boost your immune system or even help to lower your blood pressure? Look no further than your pantry.

If your kitchen is like most, it's stocked with garlic, and while this compact vegetable bud can supercharge almost any recipe with flavour and aroma, it is also good for you.

In the Middle Ages, French priests believed garlic could protect them against the Bubonic Plague. During the 20th century, World War soldiers applied garlic directly on their wounds to fight infection.

Today there are two garlic varieties: hardneck and softneck, with about 600 sub-varieties. Ontario-grown garlic is the hardneck variety which features four to six large cloves. In June, hardneck garlic produces what's called a scape or the flower stalk, a distinctive feature that is common to members of the allium family (onions, leeks, chives, and garlic). As they grow, garlic scapes curl upward, eventually straightening out and creating small seed-like bulbs. Garlic scapes have a tender, mild flavour without the garlic "bite" that is the hallmark of the fully ma-

ture vegetable.

Softneck garlic is more adapted to warmer climates, and much of this variety is produced in China. Characteristics of softneck varieties include a smaller bulb containing smaller cloves.

When it comes to growing garlic in Ontario, one of the challenges facing farmers is price competition. Although imports from China and other countries can be less expensive than Ontario garlic, our locally grown produce stands high above the rest for both its superior taste and its quality. And as any cook knows, the ingredients can make or break a dish, so paying a little more for Ontario-grown garlic not only helps to support local farmers, but it is also a great way to indulge your taste buds with the full, robust flavour of top-quality garlic.

Garlic can grow in almost any soil but prefers well-drained sandy earth. In fact garlic is now being used as a tobacco replacement crop by farmers in southwestern Ontario where the soil that has long been favourable to growing tobacco leaves is well suited to other crops like garlic.

Mark Wales is vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and also president of the Garlic Growers Association of Ontario. This former tobacco farmer, who now grows garlic and other vegetables near Aylmer, Ontario, says, "Historical-

ly, about 85 per cent of Canadian tobacco production occurred in Ontario and this crop played a significant role in the province's economy.

"Former tobacco growers now need to think and act outside of the box because growing a new crop like garlic is not about producing the product but rather, it is about establishing the market itself. That is why many farmers are marketing themselves as well as the product they are selling," he says.

The Garlic Growers Association of Ontario has about 100 members and according to Wales, "Garlic could easily be a cash crop grown by hundreds

of Ontario farmers, producing several thousand acres and providing the Canadian fresh market with quality product. In reality, our 100 members are producing less than 500 acres and are facing significant competition from lower-quality imports that are flooding the Canadian market. The value of buying top-quality, Ontario-grown garlic will quickly prove there is no other taste like it — for your food and your health."

To learn more about garlic or to try out some tasty garlic-laden recipes, check out the Garlic Growers Association of Ontario web site: <http://www.garlicgrowers.on.ca/>