

Cape Elizabeth Community Garden Organic Bulletin #3



Garlic Scapes

What are they?

Garlic scapes are the "flower stalks" of hardneck garlic plants, although they do not produce flowers. These stalks start to appear a month or so after the first leaves. They are usually cut off of the plant, since leaving them on only diverts the plants strength away from forming a plump bulb. If left on, they eventually form small bulbils that can be planted to grow more garlic, but it takes 2–3 years for them to form large bulbs. Many gardeners simply toss their scapes in the compost, but garlic scapes are both edible and delicious, as are the bulbils.

All garlic varieties produce a stem, but it's the hardneck Rocombole garlics that send out the curling scapes that gave them the nickname ' serpent garlic'. There are many types of Rocombole and the flavor of the scapes can vary considerably from variety to variety, just as with garlic bulbs. But if you have a favorite variety of garlic that grows well in your garden, you will probably enjoy its scapes.

When and how do you harvest them?

When the scapes are just starting to poke up above the leaves, they are tender enough to eat fresh. Garlic scapes get tougher, the longer they grow. Although they twist and turn and look wonderfully exotic as they grow, they become hotter and more fibrous, requiring peeling and some gentle cooking before eating. Cut them as they are starting their first circle to get the most balanced flavor.

Snapping the scape off with your fingers, as you would with asparagus, will ensure that you get the most tender portion, but cutting them is a bit gentler on the bulb. The plant will probably ooze a bit, but that will stop when the sun warms it and seals the cut.

Keep in mind that you do not have to cut the scapes at all. Your garlic will still form a bulb, it just won't be as large as it might have been. Some gardeners argue that leaving the scapes on results in a longer storing garlic bulb. As the garlic matures, the scape will straighten out. **Tall, straight scapes are a sign that the garlic is ready to be harvested**

How do you use them?

If you harvest your scapes young and tender, you can chop them into salads or use them as a topping, like scallions. More mature scapes can be sauteed lightly and used over pasta, with eggs, mixed with cooking greens, pickled or pretty much in any dish that would be complemented by garlic. Below is a recipe from the NY Times, 6/18/08:

White Bean and Garlic Scapes Dip

Time: 15 minutes

1/3 cup sliced garlic scapes (3 to 4)

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice, more to taste

1/2 teaspoon coarse sea salt, more to taste

Ground black pepper to taste

1 can (15 ounces) cannellini beans, rinsed and drained

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil, more for drizzling.

1. In a food processor, process garlic scapes with lemon juice, salt and pepper until finely chopped. Add cannellini beans and process to a rough purée.

2. With motor running, slowly drizzle olive oil through feed tube and process until fairly smooth. Pulse in 2 or 3 tablespoons water, or more, until mixture is the consistency of a dip. Add more salt, pepper and/or lemon juice, if desired.

3. Spread out dip on a plate, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with more salt.

Yield: 1 1/2 cups.