



GARLIC

101

WE DON'T MINCE WORDS

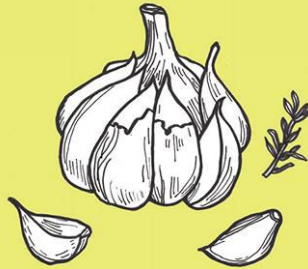
An aromatic staple that forms the flavor foundation for many cuisines, garlic is usually available year-round in China, Mexico and Spain. Argentina often has garlic December through April, plus August. California also grows and sells garlic, but demand exceeded supply during the COVID-19 pandemic for some companies, which are sourcing from Europe and Latin America until mid-June 2022.

Import delays from China have caused some suppliers to switch to Spanish garlic, said Clara Shih, owner of Best Buy Produce International. With headquarters in Vernon, Calif., and Irvington, N.J., the company sources garlic domestically and internationally before peeling, packing, labeling and selling it.

Garlic falls into one of two main categories: hard-neck and soft-neck. The most common commercial varieties fall in the soft-neck category, which can grow in the Mediterranean-like climate of Central California. Hard-neck varieties are grown in colder northern climates and have a stiff seed stalk.

Elephant and white are the most popular varieties, but there's sometimes a Monviso heirloom variety from California. The elephant variety, more closely related to a leek, can have a single clove as large as the entire bulb of standard garlic.

According to Fresh Trends 2021, ethnic background plays a big role



in garlic purchases, with Hispanic shoppers the most likely group overall to buy garlic — more than half selected this bulb in 2020. Asian consumers were also top garlic purchasers.

Garlic's health benefits are one reason for its rise in popularity. Filled with antioxidants that help boost the immune system, its compounds can help prevent cancer and can help lower the tendency of platelets to build up and block arteries.

Promotion opportunities are endless. For football game-day promotions, garlic is a natural addition to salsa and other dips. For winter holidays, it's a great ingredient in stuffing and for stir fry dishes for Chinese New Year promotions. This allium ties in well with heartier winter dishes and soups.

If kept cool and dry, garlic can be stored for eight months or longer.

U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection rules classify garlic as either white or purple/red. It has only one grade: U.S. No. 1, requiring it to be hard, compact, fairly plump, dry, well-cured and at least 1.5 inches in diameter. *pmg*

— Amy Sowder