

# A little garlic goes a long way



Garlic is thought to have originated in central Asia.

[\(Full-size photo\)](#)

Luscious, pungent and powerful, garlic is best in small doses.

Overdo it, and the stinking rose is like a lover who wines, dines and overindulges you, then leaves you in the morning bloated, gassy and with a bad taste in your mouth.

What else might you expect from a sulfurous bulb believed to ward off vampires and evil spirits as well as prevent cancer and the common cold?

Throughout history, garlic has been used for medicinal as well as culinary purposes. It's thought to have originated in central Asia and been used by humans for some 7,000 years. In the Talmud, ancient Hebrew writers refer to themselves as "the garlic eaters." Greeks gave garlic to their athletes for strength. Ancient Egyptians believed it aided in endurance. Garlic bulbs were found in King Tut's tomb, preserved for more than 3,000 years.

Today, it's particularly popular in Provençal, Chinese, Korean, Indian and Italian cooking. But the fragrant bulb is widely used around the world in all kinds of cuisines. Garlic is basically ubiquitous.

"Tomatoes and oregano make it Italian. Wine and tarragon make it French. Sour cream makes it Russian. Lemon and cucumber make it Greek. Soy sauce makes it Chinese. Garlic makes it good," wrote Alice May Brock in her 1969 cookery book, "Alice's Restaurant Cookbook."

China produces the most, some 20 million tons per year. But garlic is easily grown and can be grown year-round in mild climates. It's used to flavor condiments and savory dishes, even desserts – especially cream- or chocolate-based sweets.

A close relative of onions, shallots, leeks and chives, garlic can be crushed, chopped, sliced, used whole or in a paste, fresh and raw or roasted or sautéed. It adds a bit of a bite to fresh salsa and depth to hot soups, stir-fries and sauces. Roast a whole head with a drizzle of olive oil – and maybe a pinch of salt and pepper – and pick out the softened, caramelized pieces from their parchment-like skins with tiny appetizer forks, then spread the rich and velvety cloves on a baguette or crostini or add them to pasta.

Cooked garlic is less overwhelming than the raw, astringent stuff. Still, enjoy too much and you might want to make sure your favorite antacid and mouthwash are on hand.

Meantime, here are a few recipes to try from “Garlic: An Edible Biography” by Robin Cherry, published in 2014 by Roost Books.

## **Aioli**

*Serve this classic French sauce with poached or grilled fish, as a dressing, stirred into soups, or as a sandwich spread.*

**1 large egg yolk, room temperature**

**3 garlic cloves, minced**

**Kosher salt, to taste**

**3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**2 teaspoon lemon juice, plus more as needed**

**Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

Add the egg yolk and garlic to the pitcher of a blender. Puree the mixture for a few seconds to combine the ingredients. Add a pinch of salt, and then, with the blender running, pour the oil through the opening in the lid until you have added about half. Add the lemon juice with the machine running, and then resume adding the oil until it has all been blended into the sauce. Adjust the seasoning with lemon juice, salt and pepper.

Aioli can be prepared up to 3 days in advance. Store it in a covered container in the refrigerator.

**Note:** This recipe contains raw or undercooked eggs. The Food and Drug Administration advises that eating raw or undercooked eggs may increase your risk of foodborne illness.

**Yield:** 1 cup

## **Garlic, Escarole and White Bean Soup**

**1 tablespoon olive oil**

**8 large garlic cloves, peeled, flattened**

**1 cup chopped onion**

**1 carrot, finely diced**

**1 teaspoon dried oregano**

**1 teaspoon dried basil**

**3 cups (packed) coarsely chopped escarole (about 1/2 large head)**

**4 cups (or more) vegetable or chicken broth**

**2 cups cooked or canned white beans, rinsed and drained**

**1 (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained**

**1/2 cup uncooked spaghetti broken into 2-inch pieces**

**1/4 cup pesto Genovese (recipe below)**

Heat the oil in a soup pot over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until the cloves are lightly browned and aromatic, about 2 minutes. Add the onion, carrot, oregano and basil, and sauté, stirring frequently, until the onions are golden, about 5 minutes.

Add the escarole and stir until the escarole wilts and is evenly coated with oil. Add the broth, beans and tomatoes. Bring the soup to a simmer and then reduce heat to medium. Add the spaghetti and continue to simmer until the spaghetti is fully cooked and the soup is flavorful, about 30 minutes.

Just before serving, stir in the pesto. Serve in a heated soup tureen or individual bowls.

**Yield:** 4 to 6 servings

### **Pesto Genovese**

**2 or 3 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped**

**2 cups basil (leaves only, no stems or flowers)**

**1/3 cup pine nuts**

**1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to store**

**1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese**

**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

Place the garlic in a food processor and pulse to grind it coarsely. Add the basil, a handful or two at a time, and puree until it is coarsely ground. Add the pine nuts and grind them together with the basil and garlic by pulsing the machine on and off a few times. Scrape down the bowl. With the food processor running, pour the olive oil through the feed tube into a thin stream. Continue to puree until it is smooth and light but still has some texture. Transfer the pesto to a bowl and stir in the cheese with a spoon. Season it with salt and pepper.

To store, place pesto in a container, top with a layer of oil, cover it tightly and keep it in the refrigerator for to 2 days. For longer storage, freeze small containers of pesto for up to 2 months.

**Yield:** 1 cup

## **Roasted Garlic Crème Brûlée**

**2 cups heavy cream**

**5 egg yolks**

**2 tablespoons sugar, plus 10 teaspoons for the brûlée**

**2 heads garlic, roasted and pureed**

**1/2 teaspoon kosher salt**

Preheat oven to 275 degrees. Arrange 5 brûlée dishes or custard cups in a deep baking dish.

Whisk together the cream, egg yolks and 2 tablespoons of sugar in a bowl until the sugar dissolves and the mixture is smooth. Add the garlic and salt and blend well. Strain the mixture into the brûlée dishes or custard cups, filling them evenly. Set the dish on a rack in the oven. Add boiling water to the baking dish to a depth of 1 inch.

Bake the custards until they are thickened and almost set (the center should be set but still wobble slightly when you shake the cup a little), about 40 minutes. Cool the custards to room temperature and then cover and refrigerate them for at least 8 and up to 24 hours.

Preheat the broiler to high. Sprinkle 2 teaspoons of sugar evenly over each custard and set the dishes or cups on a broiler pan or baking sheet. Broil the custards until the sugar turns dark brown and forms a crisp crust, about 6 minutes. Serve at once.

**Yield:** 5 servings

