

Grade 11 Informational

Garlic

Hmmmm. What is that smell? Could it be food that's been around for over 6,000 years? As a matter of fact, yes! Garlic is one of the oldest seasonings – and odors – on the menu today. Although garlic was once scorned as a substandard ingredient, Americans now consume more than 250 million pounds of this pungent product annually. Garlic, a spice with a long and varied history, is now celebrated around the world for its flavor and health benefits.

Garlic plants have small, white flowers and leaves that are long, narrow and flat like grass. The bulb, or head, which grows underground, is made up of several smaller parts, called cloves. The cloves are enclosed in a papery, whitish skin. The garlic cloves are the only part of the plant that is edible and used in cooking.

Evidence of the uses of garlic dates back to the ancient Egyptians, who placed sculptured clay garlic bulbs in Tutankhamen's tomb. Historically, this relative of the onion has been used as currency, as well as fuel for multiple myths and superstitions. Perhaps the most well known of these is garlic's use as a repellent for vampires. Even Greek Olympian athletes chewed garlic to improve their performance.

Garlic is believed by many to have health benefits, although many, such as improvement in cholesterol levels, have not been scientifically proven. Garlic also has been shown to have anti-fungal and antibiotic properties. A chemical called allicin in raw, crushed garlic kills bacteria under laboratory conditions. Some believe garlic can improve the immune system and help to prevent colds. Garlic is a great source of vitamins B6 and C, as well as anti-oxidants that protect the body from harmful compounds. Garlic sprays are used to repel insects including some types of mosquitoes. Since garlic seeps through the pores in one's skin when large amounts are eaten, some theorize that this layer of garlic oil creates a barrier for the biting pests. One must use caution if consuming large amounts of garlic, however, since it may cause problems with some prescription medications, irritate the digestive system, or create allergic reactions. Folks who consume a great deal of garlic may also find that their breath has a telltale aroma, but those dedicated to the health benefits discount this problem, saying, "Garlic breath is better than no breath!"

Some enthusiasts are so passionate about garlic that they have organized a festival devoted to the odiferous herb. Since 1979, millions have traveled to Gilroy, California for this event each July. Music, arts and crafts, and the famous garlic cook-off draw the newly curious and the experienced aficionado. Recipes for garlic nachos, garlic ice cream, and garlic soup tantalize tourists and help to raise money for charitable causes.

From home remedies and money, history to modern times, garlic is certainly an herb of great influence.

Grade 11 Narrative

Uncle Wilbur

My uncle Wilbur used to spend hours every day checking on the lightning rods that stood guard on the roof of his house. We get a lot of storms here in Alabama. Sometimes we see wind up to sixty miles per hour and baseball-size hail. Lightning, Uncle Wilbur says, is a living thing, and like a cat, it will strike anything that moves. You'd better not tempt it, he always told us, because you never know when you'll be walking along one day and—"bam!"—you'll find yourself charred like a piece of chicken gristle that got left in the grease too long. He advised my cousins and me to always be mindful of the nearest sheltering tree. He said we should be prepared to drop to the ground like a hot potato at the first sound of thunder. Knowing that lightning is attracted to the tallest thing around, Uncle Wilbur worried constantly about my cousin Jared, who, at sixteen, was 6'2" and still growing.

Uncle Wilbur has always been a smart man. We all listened as he dismissed the automobile as a passing fancy. Every year it seemed more and more Model Ts came rolling into town, but Uncle Wilbur insisted that nothing could replace the reliability of a good old-fashioned mule when it came to transportation, work, or even entertainment. Yes, Uncle Wilbur's Mule Olympics, complete with obstacle courses and a long jump, was known far and wide as one of the most exciting events of the year. Sadly, the Mule Olympics did not survive into the next decade because the mules got too old and lost interest.

Nonetheless, my uncle Wilbur continued to predict future trends and warn us of impending tragedy. To this day, he reminds us that he foresaw the stock market crash of 1929, and that's why he kept his money wrapped in a handkerchief under his mattress. (Considering that a large portion of it was Confederate money, he didn't have much to begin with, but even if he had, he would not have trusted it to banks, the federal government, or any such gambling operation as the New York Stock Exchange.) When they started collecting income taxes a few years back, Uncle Wilbur refused to share his wealth with Uncle Sam, believing that one day someone would challenge this highway robbery in a court of law. He felt that by refusing to pay taxes now, he was just saving the government that extra step of having to return his money in the future. Unfortunately, Uncle Wilbur soon faced possible jail time for back taxes, which he promptly paid, still insisting that the money was just a temporary loan.

Suspicious of all bureaucratic officials, Uncle Wilbur did not take kindly to the power company man who came knocking one day in 1936. This was the year the government launched a campaign to bring electricity to rural areas like ours. Most folks, like Uncle Wilbur, were a little wary of having electricity in their homes. Many of us had running water, and we just weren't sure that the two mixed. Nevertheless, Uncle Wilbur was downright floored when the man said he wanted to string power lines up to the house. Nearly losing his temper, Uncle Wilbur exclaimed, "Here I am doing everything in my power to keep from getting struck by lightning, and you want to bring it right to my doorstep?" He sent the man on his way with a "No, thank you," and a "Good day, sir," but in the months that followed, we all eventually relented and let in the light. I must admit, playing checkers in the dark is a talent you can easily

lose without daily practice.

Many things have changed since those times. Uncle Wilbur still lives in mortal fear of a lightning strike, but because he doesn't get out much anymore, most of his lightning rods have rusted through and fallen to the ground. Now that he's retired, Uncle Wilbur lives mostly on Social Security, which he proudly proclaims as his victory. (See, he says, the government did *eventually* give his money back.) He probably spends more time reminiscing about the past than he does making future predictions, but Uncle Wilbur will be the first to tell you that television will never be as popular as radio, and the idea of a human traveling into outer space is just plain crazy!