

Nick Young, President Australian Garlic Industry Assocn and garlic farmer

From Ancient Roots to Australian Fields

A glimpse into garlic's ancient past and its modern Australian growers

At the Australian Garlic Industry Association (AGIA), we like to say that garlic has always found its way into human history—and into our hearts.

For over 5,000 years, this remarkable bulb has travelled alongside civilisation. The ancient Egyptians fed garlic to their workers to keep them strong and healthy as they built the pyramids. Roman soldiers carried it into battle as both food and medicine. Across India, China and Greece, garlic was valued for its healing and vitality-giving properties. And of course, along the way it earned a reputation as protection against evil spirits, disease... and even vampires.

Garlic's Australian story began modestly, with two plants arriving with the First Fleet. Yet it wasn't until the 1990s that garlic truly began to establish itself as a staple in Australian paddocks, kitchens and markets.

In Australia, we grow more than 100 varieties of garlic across 11 different groups. Names like Australian White, Monaro Purple, Glenlarge and Spanish Roja may be familiar to garlic lovers, but behind each name is a carefully matched relationship between plant and place. Temperature, soil type, water access and farming practices all influence how a garlic variety performs. What thrives in one climate zone may struggle in another and understanding that connection is key to growing exceptional garlic.

Just as no two varieties grow the same, they don't taste the same either. That unmistakable aroma and bite we associate with garlic comes from a compound called allicin. Allicin levels vary widely between varieties and are also influenced by how garlic is prepared. Finely chopping fresh garlic releases a powerful punch, especially if it's left to sit for around ten minutes, allowing allicin to reach its peak. Heat, on the other hand—through roasting or ageing—softens both the flavour and the allicin content, creating a completely different taste.

Despite our growing expertise, most garlic eaten in Australia is still imported. In 2024, only 20% of garlic consumed here was grown locally, with imports largely coming from China, Argentina, Mexico, Spain and Peru. Traditionally, Australian garlic production was concentrated in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas of New South Wales and the Lockyer Valley in Queensland. Encouragingly, we've seen a rise in new growers—both small-scale and commercial—responding to increasing demand for fresh, locally grown Australian garlic.

Amanda Rofe of Balmattum Garlic is one of those growers. Her garlic journey began in 2019 with a chance conversation. Curiosity turned into research, and before long

Amanda had her first crop in the ground. That first harvest, by her own admission, was a disaster—but it came with an unexpected opportunity. Small bulbs that couldn't be sold commercially were instead transformed into minced garlic, marking the beginning of Balmattum's value-added product line. Remember this tip at home if your bulbs aren't bulging!

Amanda recommends her own practices of eliminating waste - small bulbs become garlic salt, garlic powder and minced garlic, while larger bulbs can be woven into braids, for decoration and ready access for the kitchen throughout the year.

In southern Queensland, Willamay Farms tells another story of garlic finding its place. Third-generation grower Desley Jackwitz had been producing conventional crops when Simon Walker joined her on the family farm. Simon's love of cooking and sharing meals with family sparked an interest in growing organic garlic. After a successful first season, the pair expanded production and Southern Cross Garlic was born. With support from the local DPI, Simon identified Glenlarge as the ideal subtropical variety for their conditions. Their hard work was recognised at the 2024 Australian Garlic Industry Association Awards with two silver medals—proof of the quality they now produce at scale. Garlic has become a central feature, not just of their farming operation, but of the shared meals that continue to inspire Simon's passion.

And that's where we come in. The Australian Garlic Industry Association is a not-for-profit, member-run organisation established in 1991 and governed by a board of elected garlic growers. Our purpose is simple: to promote, develop and strengthen Australia's garlic industry. We've been proud to develop the Australian Garlic Awards, celebrate the South Gippsland Garlic Festival in Korumburra, launching an updated Garlic Marketplace connecting growers directly with customers and partnering with Diggers to make locally grown varieties available to gardeners everywhere.

Nothing beats growing delicious organic garlic in your own backyard! From ancient history to home gardens and modern Australian farms, garlic has always been more than just an ingredient. It's a story of resilience, flavour, and community—and we're happy to help tell it.