

# Five Ways To Spice Up Garlic Sales

*Value-added, organics and creative displays play a significant role in successful garlic sales.*

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

**G**arlic has long been a popular spice for a number of cultures. Today, Americans also enjoy a love affair with garlic. It's no wonder. A wealth of health benefits, the flavor-without-fat trend, and the widespread popularity of side dishes, such as garlic mashed potatoes, are all driving sales of this robust flavored relative of the onion, leek, shallot and chive.

Marvin Lyons, produce director at Bigg's, an 11-store chain based in Milford, OH, says, "Garlic long ago moved from being an ethnic specialty to a mainstream item. It's a staple seller for us."

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), per capita consumption of garlic has increased from 1.1 pounds in 1985 to a forecasted 2.8 pounds in 2009, with approximately one third of this going to the fresh market, while the remainder is being used for processed products.

## 1. BUILD SALES AROUND BULB GARLIC

Fresh, whole heads of garlic "still dominate in terms of sales, even though we carry several value-added garlic products as well," reports Bigg's Lyons.

David Grimes, owner of David E. Grimes Co., a Hollister, CA-based marketing company that focuses heavily on fresh garlic, believes, "Most customers who know garlic go for the fresh, whole bulb." In addition to his own company, Grimes is also a sales associate for Vessey & Co. Inc., based in Holtville, CA.

Flavor is key, relates John Duffus, sales and marketing manager for The Garlic Company, in Bakersfield, CA. "There's nothing like fresh garlic. The taste differs from



Photo courtesy of Christopher Ranch LLC

**Garlic displayed next to tomatoes and avocados provides a color break and usage suggestions.**

processed types."

White bulbs of garlic are among the most desirable. However, Grimes explains, "Sometimes we get rain at harvest and the bulb color is affected, but there is nothing wrong with the garlic; it is just Mother Nature's way. White or purple, it's all about flavor."

Purple garlic imported from Mexico is something chefs love and consumers clamor for, reports Pam Mitchell, a sales associate at Empacadora GAB Inc., in Mcallen, TX. "It's only available for a short season — mid-March to mid-September — but when retailers merchandize a display of white bulb garlic with purple in the center, the purple goes first. It's usually a premium ring because of the flavor; the cloves are huge."

As for the size of the head, "The bigger the better," asserts Anthony Sharrino, president of Eaton & Eustis Co, in Chelsea, MA.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles, CA, adds, "Upscale foodie and gourmet customers look for jumbo- and colossal-sized heads of garlic because the cloves are larger and therefore, easier to chop. However, these large sizes represent only around 5 percent of the crop."

Some 90 percent of fresh, whole heads of garlic are sold in bulk, estimates Sharrino. "A small amount is packaged. We offer two heads in a cello wrap and also 1-pound mesh bag."

## 2. OFFER ORGANIC

Lyons notes, "At Bigg's, we carry both organic and conventional garlic. The organic is merchandized in the organic section."

Louis J. Hymel III, director of purchasing and marketing for Orlando, FL-based

Spice World Inc., reports, "Organic fresh and organic ready-to-use jar garlic are readily available and gaining ground."

Maurice A. Auerbach Inc. in South Hackensack, NY, offers whole heads of organic garlic in an 8-ounce, plastic clamshell. President and CEO Paul Auerbach remarks, "The pack brings attention to the category and allows retailers to sell it either in the organic or conventional section."

### 3. INCLUDE VALUE-ADDED OPTIONS

Most consumers have a need for differ-

ent types of garlic, says The Garlic Company's Duffus, "That translates to multiple sales. For example, people will comment to me that if they're making a special dish or dinner, they will buy fresh garlic. But, they'll also keep a jar of processed garlic on hand when they need a bit for a quick flavoring."

Even though value-added garlic doesn't have the same taste as fresh, its convenience ranks as the big selling point, says Grimes of David E. Grimes. "In this day and age, consumers are looking at ease-of-use and time savings and therefore, choosing the peeled and jarred garlic products."

Hymel concurs, adding, "Processed garlic has proven its value for all cooks — no waste, very convenient, time-saving and always available in the kitchen. Such value in cooking also has the tendency for consumers to use the product more often. This is proven through recorded sales volume over the years, making it a very profitable produce item."

One trend in product development on the value-added garlic front is a flavored product. For example, Frieda's, in Los Alamitos, CA, offers Frieda's Garlic Delights, a line of flavored, fresh, chopped garlic products that come in Original, Chipotle, Sun-Dried Tomato and Green Olive. The products are packaged in 7-ounce, re-sealable tubs. Karen Caplan, president, says, "These are great for in-store cross-promotions with fresh vegetables such as broccoli, carrots and potatoes, or to cross-merchandise near roasted pork."

Another product making stronger sales at retail is whole, peeled garlic cloves. Duffus calls it "the new mousetrap in the garlic business." This product has taken its cue from foodservice, where chefs over the last decade have found the pre-peeled cloves labor- and time-saving, yet close in flavor to fresh garlic.

Garlic suppliers, such as The Garlic Company, have gone a step further and now offer the ultra-convenience of a single, recipe-sized pouch containing three to four whole garlic cloves. Duffus offer details: "Each of our VakPaks comes with individual pouches that have easy-to-open pull tabs. The peeled garlic inside is 100 percent ready-to-use. This allows consumers to purchase the amount of fresh garlic they need without wasting or throwing away excess product or packaging. We suggest the VakPaks, which contain three portion packs of whole, peeled garlic cloves and weighs 1½ ounces, retail for under \$1.50."

### 4. SELL THE SOURCE STORY

Price, seasonality and food safety are among top decision points in produce buyer's minds when sourcing garlic. Price is important to consumers too, but flavor is also an important factor. Lyons discloses, "We've sourced from China due to the cheap price, but we're now moving back to California because of consumer concerns about food safety and requests for better flavor."

Similarly, Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral for Rice Epicurean Markets, an upscale market with five stores in the Houston, TX, area, says, "We try to source year-round from California, but product from China is attractive due to low pricing. That's definitely a concern for some customers in this economy."



**"The garlic produced and processed by and for I Love Produce in China can be assumed to be of highest quality of any available to the American consumer. It is organic produced. The production, handling and processing environments and methods are clean, sanitary, safe and well documented. The product traceability is, at least, equal to others in the market.**

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1. The system of garlic production used;
2. The documentation by internationally recognized certification agencies of safe and sustainable food production and processing methods used;
3. My review of records and documents; and
4. My observation of field, packing, processing, packaging and storing operations.

- **Dr. Ron Voss**  
Professor Emeritus & Extension Vegetable Specialist  
University of California at Davis, April 2009

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China is the largest producer of garlic, supplying over 75 percent of world tonnage, according to the University of California at Davis' Agricultural Marketing Resource Center's January 2006 published report, *Commodity Profile: Garlic*. The United States ranks fourth in global garlic production, behind India and the Republic of Korea. California accounts for 82 percent of domestically harvested acreage.

For the U.S. market, says Grimes of David E. Grimes, "Major garlic sourcing areas are California, Argentina and Mexico. China is a major factor, but the verdict is still out on sanitary issues and if the cheap prices should be considered dumping."

Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco Inc., located in the Bronx, NY, adds, "Another problem is flavor. Chinese garlic is mild. It doesn't have the distinctive quality and flavor that Americans prefer."

Chinese garlic is a different variety than that grown in California, adds Duffus of The Garlic Co. "It has a hot taste like an onion, but a mild garlic flavor. You need to use more of it to get the desired garlic taste."

The California garlic industry runs traditionally nine months. Yet it is growing close, if not already, to offering a year-round supply. Doug Stanley, general manager for Coalinga, CA-based Harris Fresh Inc.,

reveals, "We're working on extending the marketing season. The crop itself dictates a lot each year — its quality and its potential for storage. Typically, if California runs out, it will be sometime between February and June, when product from Mexico and Argentina is available."

As for food safety, Duffus declares, "A lot of buyers prefer California because of traceability. In China, there are thousands of garlic farmers and it's virtually impossible to trace the product."

What therefore plays out is a two-tier market, says Auerbach of The Maurice Auerbach Co. "High-end retailers will source garlic from California, Mexico and Argentina, while the rest will also buy from China."

## 5. CREATIVELY DISPLAY & CONSISTENTLY PROMOTE

Different stores. Different clientele. Different customer preferences. Spice World's Hymel notes, "Retailers that perform the best and generate the most sales within the garlic category are those offering the most garlic products. Usually the produce departments that lag behind in garlic sales are the ones lacking in garlic variety."

Auerbach concurs, adding, "Retailers can carry anywhere from two to three up to eight to 10 or more different types of garlic products and packs."

Another piece of advice? Think color, suggests Patsy Ross, vice president of marketing for Christopher Ranch LLC, base in Gilroy, CA. "Set garlic off in a display next to

# What's New? Take A Look At Black Garlic

It looks like a regular head of garlic on the outside, but inside the cloves are jet black in color. Black Garlic is food enthusiasts' latest temptation and sensation, making its debut in February on television shows such as Bravo TV's *Top Chef* and the Food Network's *Iron Chef America*, as well as being dubbed by the *Washington Post* as the "next food trend."

Black garlic has a subtle, yet complex flavor, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's World Variety Produce, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. "It can be added to improve the flavor of almost any dish that would benefit from a mildly sweet, tangy garlic flavor. Due to its sweet and chewy texture, chefs describe it as a 'licorice wine gum' and reminiscent of 'roasted garlic with undertones of malt and molasses.'"

Black garlic is created when whole heads of Korean-grown garlic are aged for one month in a special, high-heat fermentation process.

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's, based in Los Alamitos, CA, adds, "The aged garlic turns a rich black color. Peeled cloves can be added to salads or used to top a variety of dishes from pasta to steak to fish. Or chop finely and mix with diced tomatoes to serve with bruschetta."

As for merchandising, Caplan suggests, "Merchandize black garlic in a special basket near the common garlic and onions in the produce department. Be sure to include informational and description signage with usage ideas."

Both Melissa's/World Variety Produce and Frieda's offer Black Garlic two heads to a bag. **pb**

bright colors and it will stand out. For example, merchandize whole heads of garlic next to red tomatoes and green avocados."

Spice World's Hymel agrees. "Garlic should be displayed and cross-merchandized with other items that it complements; this will drive sales and purchases of these other items. For example, display garlic next to tomatoes, corn and potatoes in the salad section. That said, garlic should always be merchandised in a permanent place in the department as well."

Additionally, make use of other departments when displaying garlic. Hymel adds, "Garlic shouldn't be limited to the produce department. It can be displayed in the bakery department next to fresh loaves of bread, suggesting garlic bread. It also can be displayed in the pasta and sauce section."

One of the biggest merchandising challenges is getting customers to look for peeled, fresh garlic cloves in the refrigerated case. Luchak of Rice Epicurean says, "We've displayed garlic cloves in our value-added section next to the fresh-cut vegetables and it has done well."

Hymel remarks there are several key opportunities throughout the year to promote garlic in any form. Promote during seasonal events, such as Cinco de Mayo, Thanksgiving, Italian festivals and summertime barbecues. Cross-promote during football season for guacamole. I once heard that 50 million avocados are eaten on Super Bowl Sunday. An extra tablespoon of garlic in the guacamole will liven up the dip." **pb**

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