

Harvesting Asparagus—continued

about 4 to 6 weeks. The third year after planting and thereafter, harvesting can continue for 6 to 8 weeks. This will all depend on weather conditions.

It is best to pick all spears each time, not allowing spears to fern out initially. This is to prevent asparagus beetles from laying their eggs in the ferns. A general rule is to stop harvesting when the diameter of most of the asparagus spears becomes pencil thin.

For the last harvest, snap all the spears off at ground level. To encourage foliage growth for the rest of the growing season, apply 1 lb. of 12-12-12 fertilizer per 50 feet of row. The foliage should be allowed to remain as long as it is green. This year's growth is making the food reserves to store for next year's crop.



Storage of Asparagus

Asparagus is perishable and should be harvested in the morning when air temperatures are cool. After picking, immerse spears in ice-cold water to remove the heat; then drain the water and place the spears in plastic bags. Store in the refrigerator at 38 to 40 degrees. Asparagus will keep for 1 to 2 weeks with little loss of quality.

Crunchy Almond Asparagus

1 lb. fresh asparagus
2 c. crushed seasoned croutons
8 oz. shredded cheddar cheese
1 can cream of chicken soup
1/2 c. chopped almonds, unblanched
1 T. melted butter

Cut asparagus into 3/4-inch pieces. Cook in 1 cup lightly salted, boiling water until tender-crisp. Drain asparagus; reserve liquid. Combine seasoned crumbs and cheese; set aside. Combine soup, reserved asparagus liquid, and asparagus. Layer 1/2 the crumb mixture in a buttered 3-quart casserole dish. Top with 1/2 the asparagus. Repeat with remaining ingredients. Toss chopped almonds with melted butter. Sprinkle over casserole. Bake at 350° for 30-35 minutes. Yield: 6 servings.

Grace Reed, Mt. Zion
from *Homemade Happiness:*
Dunkard Brethren Cookbook, 3rd edition, 2007.



For more information on growing asparagus, visit the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service Web site, and download HO-96W, "Growing Asparagus in the Home Garden."

How to Grow Asparagus



Compliments of



Garden Gate Greenhouse, Inc.
3415 E 500 S
Peru, In 46970

765-473-4992

How to Grow Asparagus



Asparagus has been cultivated for over 2,000 years in the eastern Mediterranean region. It was brought to America with the early colonists.

Its name derives from the Greek word *asparagos*, which means “sprout” or “shoot.” Ancient Greeks and Romans prized it for various medicinal qualities. Today, we value asparagus because it is loaded with nutrients, contains fiber, folate, chromium, vitamins A, C, E, K, and the amino acid asparagine.

Asparagus should be considered a long-term perennial vegetable crop (15 years or more) that will require generous space, preferably in an out-of-the-way spot. It grows best in fertile, well-drained soil in an area that gets at least 6 hours of sun a day. Soil pH should be 6.5 to 7.5.

Preparing to Plant

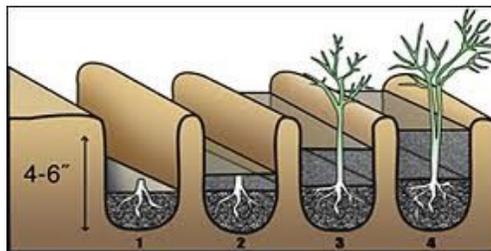
Asparagus is most often planted from crowns, which are the base and roots of one-year-old asparagus plants. Plant from early April to late May after the soil has warmed to about 50°F. They will not grow until the soil warms. If the crowns are exposed to cold wet soils over a prolonged period, *Fusarium rot* can become a threat. Plant the asparagus at the west or north side of the garden so that it will not shade other vegetables.



Dig a Trench!

Dig a furrow or trench about 6 inches deep, piling the excess soil to the sides of the trench. Scatter about 1 lb. of 12-12-12 fertilizer per 50 feet of row in the bottom of the furrow. Then rake the fertilizer in well. This will make phosphorus immediately available to the crowns without the risk of burning them by direct contact.

Carefully spread crowns to loosen them, then place in the furrow, about 18 inches apart. If the crowns seem too stiff, soften them ahead of time in water. If you plant more than one row, space the rows five feet apart from center to center. There are two schools of thought on covering the crowns. Some prefer to loosely backfill the trench to a little over its original soil level, taking care not to compact the soil. Others prefer to cover the crowns with about two inches of soil, then, as the shoots emerge, continue to sift soil into the trench until it is slightly mounded at the top. Weather may dictate the best method for you. Heavy rain could cause problems with the second method.



Weed Control

Weed control is essential to establish a strong asparagus bed. Early hand pulling of weeds, hoeing, and cultivating are the best methods. An organic mulch can also help to suppress weeds. Note: the dense fern canopy that forms later will also help to shade out weed growth.

Do not use salt as a weed killer! This is an old home-spun remedy. Although salt will not harm the asparagus, it inhibits water penetration in the soil. More important, rain can leach the salt out of the asparagus bed and into the rest of the garden, injuring other vegetables.



Harvesting

You do not have to wait two years after planting to harvest asparagus spears. Research shows that harvesting one year after planting stimulates more bud production on the crowns. Harvest asparagus by snapping 7 to 9 inch spears with tight tips. It is best not to cut asparagus below the soil with a knife, as this may injure other buds on the crown.



Most often, the first year after planting, you will harvest several times throughout a three-week period. Two years after planting, the harvest can increase to