

ALL READY FOR ASPARAGUS?

GARDENING SEASON

Late April through June

CHOOSING TIPS

Select stalks that are firm and straight with compact tips. The spears should be round and snap easily when bent. Asparagus should be a vibrant green color.

Do not choose asparagus if:

- § It is badly scarred
- § It is droopy and wilted
- § The tips are spreading



STORAGE

Asparagus is best eaten on the day it is harvested. To store it, trim ¼ inch off the bottom of the stalks and place in 2 inches of standing water, or wrap a moist towel around it. Asparagus can be stored in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days.

PREPARATION

Rinse with cold water. Cut off the bottom of the stalk, as it is usually woody and tough. Pare away any rough edges with a potato peeler. Asparagus can be steamed, boiled or roasted with olive oil.

KEY NUTRIENTS

- § Vitamin A for vision, healthy skin, and resistance to infection.
- § Vitamin C for healthy gums, skin and blood.
- § Fiber to prevent constipation.
- § Potassium to maintain normal blood pressure.
- § Folate to prevent birth defects and reduce the risk of heart disease.

RECIPES

Asparagus with lemon mustard vinaigrette

- 1 1/2 pounds fresh asparagus, washed and trimmed
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 teaspoons lemon & pepper seasoning
- 1 tablespoon country-style Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon red-wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 cup olive or vegetable oil

Steam or boil the asparagus for 7 to 10 minutes, or until tender. Rinse with cold water. Place the asparagus on a large platter and top with the red onion. Combine the remaining ingredients, drizzle over the asparagus and serve. Serves 6; 120 Cal; 9 g fat.

Asparagus with Yogurt Dill Sauce

- 3 cloves garlic, minced
 - 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 - 1 teaspoon prepared mustard
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt
 - 1/8 teaspoon pepper
 - 2 tablespoons minced parsley
 - 1 teaspoon minced dill
 - 1 cup plain low fat yogurt
 - 2 pounds fresh asparagus, steamed
- Mix everything except the asparagus together in a bowl and allow it to stand for at least an hour before serving. Serve over steamed asparagus. Serves 8; 50 cal; <1 g fat.



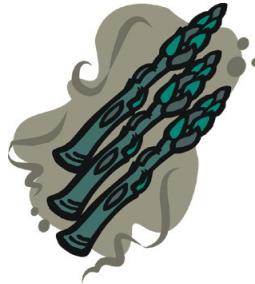
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Growing Asparagus in Wisconsin

Asparagus is one of the few fresh vegetables grown in Wisconsin that is a perennial. Since asparagus is a perennial plant, avoid establishing in sites that have a history of perennial weed problems such as quackgrass, Canada thistle, and creeping Jenny or eliminate these weeds before planting. Perennial weeds intermixed with asparagus can be very difficult to control.

Planting Asparagus

- Purchase either transplants or one -year old healthy crowns
- Plant after April 15th
- Dig a 6 to 8 inch deep trench
- Place the crowns 18 to 24 inches apart in rows that are 3 feet apart
- Cover the crown with 2 inches of soil
- Gradually fill the trench throughout the growing season



Soil and Fertility

- Select sites with well drained soil
- Before planting, work a generous amount of compost or organic matter into the soil
- Work 1 pound of fertilizer mix into the soil per 10 feet of row (select a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-20)
- In established asparagus, spread a complete fertilizer at the end of the cutting season around July 15th
- Maintain pH at 6.5 to 7.0

Recommended amount per acre: 60 lb nitrogen—10 lb phosphate—20 lb potassium

Asparagus Types

Asparagus varieties traditionally were open pollinated. Individual plants are dioecious which means they express solely male or female flower parts. More recently hybrid male varieties have been released that can yield twice that of traditional ones. Male plants have a greater spear yield because they do not have to invest energy into producing seeds. Jersey Gem, Jersey Giant and Jersey Knight are good all-male varieties for Wisconsin. Mary Washington is a reliable traditional variety that is recommended in Wisconsin. Purple varieties have also become available. White asparagus is produced by growing under black plastic tunnels. Leave tunnels in place until after harvest.

Handling Asparagus

Harvest asparagus beginning in the third growing season. Select well developed spears with closed tips. Cut or snap spears near the soil surface when they are 6 to 8 inches tall and at least a dime diameter. Harvest lasts for about two weeks the first year and increases about a week per year as the stand ages. A mature stand will produce spears for about six weeks. Asparagus deteriorates rapidly after harvest. If not eaten immediately after harvest, consider processing or refrigerating.

Remaining asparagus tops can be removed when they dry in the fall or left as a cover and removed the following spring.

