

Asparagus

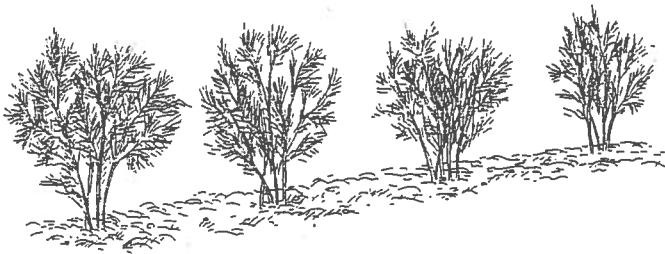
As early as 200 B.C. the Romans had how-to-grow directions for asparagus. They enjoyed it in season and preserved it for later use by drying.

Its characteristics were so well-known to the ancients that 1st century Emperor Augustus described haste to his underlings as being "quicker than you can cook asparagus."

A 16th century Englisher said of 'sperage': "It is delicious eaten with oyl and vinegar." Records of plantings in American gardens attest to the long life of this vegetable. From the Middlebury, Vt., Register in 1917: "There is an asparagus bed on the Elios Lyman farm . . . which was started 101 years ago and continues to this day to yield a generous crop."

When you grow asparagus you are joining Mother Nature in a classic demonstration of her growth power. What a manufacturing plant!

In summer, its graceful, fern-like foliage stands tall to the sun. The leaves are manufacturing food in excess of their needs for growth and are storing the excess in the roots. The big transfer to storage will come when the tops die.



Asparagus ferns in summer

With the warming of the soil the following spring, stalks rise from the crown to renew the plant. All growth now is on stored food in the roots. (The manufacturing plant is on battery power.)

Many more shoots will form than are needed for the renewal of the plant. So you prune the shoots — a few or more the first year. More the second. The third year should give you 4 weeks of cutting.

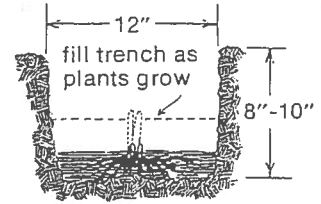
Prepare soil. When planting asparagus you are building the foundation for 10 to 15 years of production. So take the time to work the soil a foot or more deep and mix in large amounts of manure, compost, peat moss or like organic material, plus 4 to 5 pounds of 5-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet.

Planting transplants (root crown). You save a year over starting from seed by buying one year old plants (crowns) from garden centers or seed companies.

Dig trenches 8 inches deep and 4 to 5 feet apart. (Asparagus roots spread wide). Spread some compost or manure in the bottom of the trench and cover with an inch of garden soil.

Set the crowns 12 inches apart in the row and cover with 2 inches of soil. As the new shoots come up, gradually fill in the trench.

Set crowns in trench 12" apart—
spread roots so they
lie flat . . .



Fertilizing. For high production and thick spears follow a twice-a-year feeding program. Make one application before growth starts in the spring and a second as soon as the harvest is finished to encourage heavy top growth.

Don't skimp on water when the top growth is developing.

Harvesting. Cut or snap off spears when 6 to 8 inches high. "Snapping"—bending the spear over sharply until it breaks — avoids injury to other shoots below ground. When cutting spears the asparagus knife is a handy tool.

Early in the season the shoots may require cutting only every third day, but as the growth becomes more active it may be necessary to cut twice a day, especially if the asparagus is growing on very light warm soil.

Serving ideas:

Fresh young asparagus is excellent raw, sliced thinly on the diagonal into green salads or included on a relish platter with a sour cream dip.

Or nestle asparagus spears in a basket of crudites: fresh raw vegetables arranged like a nosegay in a small wicker basket. Serve with mayonnaise or a French tapenade sauce composed of mayonnaise seasoned with chopped ripe olives and anchovies.

Serve hot cooked asparagus spears with browned butter, sieved egg yolk, and chopped watercress to lavish over each serving as the Dutch do.

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