

Asparagus



Asparagus Overview

- Early-spring vegetable
- Best suited to cooler areas of North and West Texas
- Produces poorly in areas with mild winters and extremely long, hot summers
- With proper care and climate, a crown can last 15 to 25 years

Asparagus Overview

- Good source of vitamin A and vitamin C
- Dioecious – it has separate male and female plants
- Yields 8 to 10 pounds or more per 100 square foot bed (20 foot row)

Asparagus – Site Selection

- Does well in full sunlight and deep, well-drained, sandy or light-textured soil
- Makes a good border around the edge of a garden or along a fence
- It will remain in the same place for several years

Asparagus – Soil Preparation

- Make sure the site is well-drained and weed free
- Avoid sites with yellow nutsedge – indicates poor drainage
- In late fall, spread a 3-inch layer of organic matter over the beds
- Till or spade to a depth of 10 to 12 inches, until organic matter is worked in
- Soil pH between 6.5 – 7.5 is best

Asparagus - Varieties

- Hybrid varieties produce better than standard cultivars
 - Martha Washington
 - US 157
 - Jersey Giant
 - Mary Washington

Asparagus - Varieties

- Male cultivars are more productive and resist disease better than female cultivars
 - Jersey Giant
 - Jersey Knight
 - Jersey Supreme
- Female cultivars (Washington types) are less vigorous and produce many red, berrylike fruits that become volunteer weeds in the garden

Asparagus - Varieties

- Purple cultivar (Purple Passion) has green flesh and large spear



Asparagus - Planting

- Grown from 1- or 2-year old crowns
- Planted in January or February
- Crowns can be grown from seed in cups, but it takes at least a year to grow a good crown
- Set rows 5 feet apart
- Dig a furrow 4 inches wide and 4 to 12 inches deep

Asparagus - Planting

- Spread 0-46-0 (super phosphate fertilizer) in the furrow at a rate of 0.75 ounce per 20 foot row
- Place crowns 12 to 14 inches apart in the furrow
- Plant crowns 6 to 12 inches deep in loose soils; 4 to 6 inches deep in heavy soils
- Cover furrow with 1 inch of compost topped with 2 to 3 inches of soil

Asparagus - Planting

- Fill the furrows gradually as the shoots grow
- Furrow should reach normal level by end of first season
- Control weeds, but be careful not to injure crown
- Can fill furrow with soil at planting, but make sure soil is not compacted

Asparagus - Planting

- Takes 2 to 3 years from time crown placed in the ground until full production
- If not harvested, spears will develop fernlike stalks
- Mature plant manufactures food and stores it in the underground crown, providing energy for to produce spears the following year

Asparagus - Fertilizing

- Soil test
- For established beds, scatter 2 pounds 10-20-10 fertilizer per 20 feet of row in late January or early February
- After last harvest, apply additional 1 to 2 pounds of 21-0-0 per 20 feet of row
- Always water the fertilizer well after applying to soil

Asparagus - Watering

- Frequent, deep watering
- Water every 3 to 5 days, depending upon soil type and temperature
- In sandy soils, root can reach 10 foot deep if adequate soil moisture is available

Asparagus – Care During Season

- Competes poorly with weeds
- Spread 4- to 6-inch thick layer of organic mulch to suppress weeds
- Require little care after establishment – control weeds
- Cover beds with 3-inch layer of straw or compost at end of season

Asparagus – Care During Season

- After first hard frost or freeze, cut off fern tops at ground level and mulch the bed
- Burn fern tops to eliminate sources of insect eggs or disease reinfestation
- If fern tops not killed by cold, remove in late November when the ferns turn yellow

Asparagus - Harvesting

- Do not harvest during the first 2 years after planting
- Harvest when spears are 4 to 10 inches long
- Harvest every other day to prevent spears from becoming fibrous
- Spears with loose or opened heads are too mature

Asparagus - Harvesting

- To harvest, break off the spears by hand at ground level
- You can cut off the spear with a knife, but it is not recommended because it can spread disease
- Stop harvesting when spear diameter becomes less than 3/8 inch or when the spear heads open up with rising temperature

Asparagus - Harvesting

- White asparagus is grown by depriving the spears of light – cover asparagus row with black plastic supported by wire hoops
- White asparagus has milder flavor and is preferred in gourmet cuisine



Asparagus – Insects

- Most significant pest – Asparagus Beetle
- Overwinters in crop residue or trash in garden
- Remove them by hand or spray with Sevin or organic insecticide

Asparagus - Diseases

- Disease can be almost eliminated with selecting a site with good drainage and pH
- Common diseases include crown rot and rusts
- Controlled with organic chemicals such as sulfur or potassium phosphite

Asparagus - Serving

- Asparagus loses quality very rapidly after harvest – sugar content declines, fibrous material increases
- Use spears with compact heads for best quality
- Can be stored up to 3 weeks in plastic bags in the refrigerator
- For longer storage, blanch spears 3 to 5 minutes, package and freeze