

ASPARAGUS

Spanish: espárragos **Russian:** spazha (спаржа) **Vietnamese:** măng tây

Asparagus is originally from the Mediterranean and was eaten by the ancient Greeks. Today, asparagus is grown in the United States, especially in Washington and California. In Oregon, asparagus season runs from mid-April through June. Though green asparagus is most common, you can also find white and purple asparagus at farmer's markets and grocery stores. Purple asparagus turns green when it is cooked. White asparagus is grown by covering the asparagus to keep out sunlight. The edible part of the asparagus plant, often called a "spear" is a shoot from the plant. The shoots develop into fernlike leaves if left unharvested.

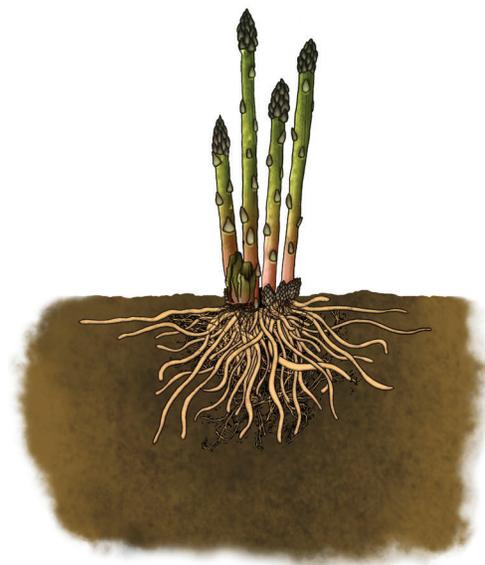
FIND OUT MORE:

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/asparagu.html>

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/asparagus.cfm>



FROM SEED TO PLATE



Asparagus is a perennial vegetable (a plant that lives for more than two years). A member of the lily family, asparagus is related to onions and leeks. Most people grow asparagus from one-year-old "crowns" or plants. Asparagus can also be grown from seed. As the plants grow, asparagus roots spread horizontally from the spears. Asparagus plants are either male or female. You can tell the female plants by the small red berries they produce in late summer. Asparagus plants take a few years to mature – harvesting begins after the third year of planting crowns.

Source: *Stinky and Stringy: Stem & Bulb Vegetables*, Meredith Sayles Hughes, 1999.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/asparagus.cfm>

http://ohioline.osu.edu/b826/b826_2.html

IN THE GARDEN

Asparagus may be a challenge for some preschool or center-based gardens, as asparagus beds should be kept in place and the plants take a few years of growth and care to be ready for harvest.

For adventurous gardeners, here are some tips for how to grow your own asparagus:



SUN: Full Sun



WATER: Regular water



SOIL: To grow asparagus, soil should have good drainage.



SEEDS: Asparagus can be grown from seed, but it is easier to grow from “crowns.” Purchase “crowns” at your local nursery or from a local grower.



PLANT: Plant in early spring. Plant in trenches that are 1 foot wide and 8-10 inches deep. Space “crowns” 1 foot apart with tops 6-8 inches below the surface. Cover with 2 inches of soil. Water.



SPACE: Asparagus take up a lot of space, and beds need to be kept in one place for many years.



CARE: Fill in the trench over time, as plants grow. Don't cover the growing tips with soil. Water regularly. When the plant turns brown in early winter, let stalks stand until spring.



HARVEST: One or two years after planting, harvest your first spears of asparagus! To harvest, cut near the soil at a 45 degree angle. The first year of harvest, cut asparagus for only 4-6 weeks or until very thin spears begin to appear. The second year of harvest, cut spears for 8-10 weeks.

FIND OUT MORE:

Sunset Western Garden Book

<http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/handle/1957/21092>

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/asparagus.cfm>

http://vric.ucdavis.edu/veg_info_crop/asparagus.htm

STORAGE AND HANDLING

- Find asparagus in green, white and purple.
- Choose asparagus that is smooth and firm with tightly packed buds.
- Avoid asparagus that is brown or limp.
- Store asparagus in the refrigerator. Wrap the bottoms in a wet paper towel, to help keep the asparagus fresh.
- Eat asparagus within 2-3 days for best flavor.

IN THE KITCHEN

Asparagus can be eaten raw, broiled or roasted in the oven, grilled, steamed, or boiled. Asparagus cooks quickly, and is easy to prepare. Before using, rinse asparagus and snap each spear where it naturally breaks above the woody portion at the bottom. Once it's prepared, use a vegetable peeler to make asparagus "ribbons" and mix with parmesan and lemon for a delicious salad. Or, cook asparagus by boiling it or steaming the vegetable, or tossing in oil and salt and roasting at 400 degrees for 10 minutes or less. Roasted asparagus is delicious with a squeeze of lime!

Try the classroom recipe at home, with this family-size version:

ASPARAGUS TACOS

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

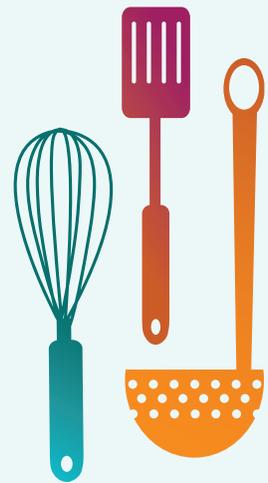
2 lbs. asparagus (2 bunches)
2 Tbs. olive oil or other vegetable oil
Salt
1 package corn tortillas or homemade tortillas

Optional, to serve:

Cotija or another crumbly white cheese
Lime
Avocado, sliced

DIRECTIONS

1. Chop or snap off the tough, woody root end of each asparagus spear. Wash and pat dry.
2. Cut each asparagus spear in half.
3. Put a large, wide pan on the stove and bring to medium heat. Add the olive oil and move the pan to coat in oil.
4. Add the asparagus and cook, stirring, for 3-4 minutes. Test the asparagus (it should be a little firm).
5. Add a small sprinkling of salt for flavor.
6. Heat the corn tortillas in a microwave or one-by-one on a hot pan, if preferred.
7. Make your taco by filling a tortilla with asparagus and whatever toppings you like. Crumbled cheese, a squeeze of lime, and a slice of avocado is delicious!



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The family newsletter for asparagus can be sent home at the beginning of the month. The newsletter is available in English, Spanish, and Russian. Print the first page only, or add photos and stories to the second page and print both sides for families.



GET PARENTS' ATTENTION!

- Attach the newsletter to the child by attaching a string of yarn to the paper and making a newsletter “necklace” or pinning the newsletter to an article of clothing.
- Attach the newsletter to a drawing or other piece of artwork created by the child
- Get a set of “Ask me about ____” stickers or nametags, or use blank nametag stickers to draw attention to the fruit or vegetable of the month. Send each child home with an “Ask me about asparagus!” sticker for the asparagus month.
- Offer tastes of the recipe of the month at a parent meeting or when parents pick up their children from your site.

ASPARAGUS VARIETIES



White • Green • Purple



ABOUT HARVEST FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Harvest for Healthy Kids is a nutrition program designed to introduce children to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables through their meals and snacks and classroom activities. Monthly family newsletters engage families as partners in helping children to develop healthy eating habits. Harvest for Healthy Kids is a partnership between Mt. Hood Community College Head Start and the School of Community Health at Portland State University.