

# GROWING ASPARAGUS



Edible asparagus, *Asparagus officinalis*, is a long-lived, perennial vegetable that can be grown and enjoyed at home in large containers, raised beds, or in veggie gardens for 15-20 years! To grow asparagus successfully, choose your planting site carefully, and be sure to prepare the soil and maintain them according to the preferences listed below. Asparagus is a delicious, rewarding crop, but does require patience and some extra care to get started compared to the typical garden edibles grown at home.

## **Light**

Prefers full sun exposure (6+ hours of direct sunlight) but can tolerate light or dappled shading.

## **Soil**

Well-drained soil is a must! Hence, raised garden beds are an ideal growing environment for this plant, especially in areas with poorly draining, heavy clay soil. Also, its soil pH needs to be maintained at a slightly higher level than normal, starting at 6.5-7.5, which may require a soil test and additional garden lime applications every year or two.

## **Watering**

Deeply with 1" of water, 1x per week, by irrigation or rainfall the first year. Asparagus is drought tolerant and requires little irrigation once established, except during extremely hot/dry summers. Apply 2" of mulch to help retain soil moisture and suppress weeds.

## **Fertilizer**

Apply a slow-release plant food high in potassium (K) in March after spring clean-up, reapplying after the last harvest. We recommend Garden-tone® or Tomato-tone®.

## **Seeds & Crowns**

Seeds can be sown indoors in February in a bright, warm location, and transplanted into prepared soil (that has settled 1-2 weeks) after the last spring frost. Crowns can be planted about one month prior to the last spring frost (mid to late April) in prepared and settled soil. Space both crowns and plants 8-12" apart with 3' between rows. Plant on top of a mounded furrow approximately 4-6" deep, covering the plants/crowns with 2-3" of soil. As the plants mature, continue filling in the furrow with soil. To propagate mature plants, divide crowns in late winter/early spring once every 3-6 years.

## **Harvest**

Occurs mid-April to May. One year after planting (plants or crowns), harvest for 7-10 days. Two years after planting, harvest for 2-3 weeks, and third year and beyond, 6-8 weeks. Harvest spears at 6-9" long, at pencil thickness or larger. Cut the spear 1" below the soil or break it near the soil surface. Stop harvesting when spears are thin, less than pencil-size.

## **Foliage**

Asparagus produces long, feathery, bright green, fern-like foliage that produces energy and food for future asparagus production. Keep ferns up all season, supported if needed, then in late autumn after turning yellow/brown, cut the ferns to 2" tall, and mulch the area with compost or Sweet Peet.

## **Miscellaneous**

Weed by hand and cultivate gently around the plants to avoid disturbing their shallow roots. Basil, beets, parsley, and tomatoes are excellent garden companions; avoid the onion family. Although asparagus is generally trouble free, watch for slugs, asparagus beetles, late-frost damage, and root/crown rot. These issues can be readily resolved, if identified quickly and treated.



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