



Because Life Should Be Beautiful™

Asparagus

Asparagus is definitely a luxury vegetable. Its price, even in season, sets it apart from cabbages and cauliflowers, and it has as taste of luxury too. The spears, especially the thick, green spears, at their best in early summer, have an intense, rich flavor that is impossible to describe but easy to remember.

GROWING:

Asparagus is a very hardy perennial living up to 10 - 15 years. During the harvest period spears develop daily from the underground crowns. The more mature the plant the thicker the asparagus.

When planting, choose a site with good drainage and full sun. Tall ferns of asparagus may shade other plants, so plant accordingly. Enrich the soil with amendments and add some sand. In heavy soils double digging is recommended.

Asparagus takes several years to mature. Shoots (spears) should not be harvested the first season after they leaf out so the foliage can nourish the growing roots and rhizome for future production. Harvest lightly 3 to 4 weeks the second year. When asparagus plants are in their fourth season, they may be harvested 6 to 10 weeks per year. Asparagus will keep for several days if necessary.

The 6" - 10" spears are the best and should be snapped off before heads open. They should be snapped or cut off just below the soil surface. Weed the bed each spring before the first shoots come up to avoid accidentally breaking of spears.

COOKING:

The problem with cooking asparagus is the stalks take longer to cook than the tender tips, which need to be only briefly steamed. Ideally, use an asparagus steamer. Place the asparagus spears with the tips upward in the wire basket and then lower into a little boiling salted water in the steamer. Cook and cover until the stems are tender.

Alternately, if you don't have an asparagus steamer, place the bundle upright in a deep saucepan of boiling salted water. (The bundle can be wedged into place with potatoes.) Cover with a dome of foil and cook 5 - 10 minutes or until the spears are tender. The cooking time depends largely on the thickness of the spears, but it is important not to over-cook, the spears should still have a bite to them.

Asparagus can also be roasted in a little olive oil. This cooking method intensifies the flavor and gratifyingly simple. Serve with just a sprinkle of sea salt, it is quite delicious. If steaming asparagus, serve simply with real melted butter, which perfectly complements the luxury of the vegetable.