



Florist, Greenhouse & Perennial Farm
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Growing Asparagus

Asparagus is a wonderful perennial vegetable that we enjoy each spring. The hardest part of growing asparagus is waiting a few years for your first harvest as it takes a couple of seasons to mature properly. The good news, though, is that once you've waiting until the 3rd or 4th growing season, a productive asparagus bed can remain in the same place in your garden for up to 30 years!!

Planting Asparagus

A good rule of thumb when determining how many plants you will need is to start with 10 plants for each person. If asparagus is a family favorite or you plan on freezing some to enjoy later, you will want to plant more.

Growing vigorous, healthy, productive plants starts with a sunny, well-drained, uninterrupted area on the edge of your garden. Properly preparing your soil bed is essential to the vigor and vitality of your asparagus patch for years to come.

As soon as the soil thaws and is dry enough to work in, plant your bare-root asparagus crowns in an area in your garden that receives full sun. The tall ferns of asparagus may shade other plants, so plan accordingly. Prepare the bed as early as possible amended with compost.

Dig a trench that is 12" deep, mounding the soil on each side for later use, spacing rows 3 to 4 feet apart. In heavy soils, double digging is recommended. After you've removed the top foot of soil, break up the subsoil with a spade into the next foot of soil by rocking it back and forth. Mix the topsoil that has been removed with organic matter and spread about 2" of the mixture into the bottom of the trench.

Plant the bare-root crowns about 15" – 18" apart, mounding the soil slightly under each plant so the crown is slightly above the roots. Spread the roots out over the soil mound and cover the crown with 2" to 3" of soil and pack well. As the plants grow taller, rake a little of the soil on the edge of the row into the trench where the

plants are growing. Repeat this method as the plants grow until the trench is filled (about 2" every couple of weeks). Water as needed if rainfall is inadequate.

Adding an herb & vegetable plant food at planting and through the summer, as directed on the label, is a great idea and will also give the plants the best growth possible during their first season.

Patience

Within weeks, you will see your first asparagus shoots breaking through the soil. As excited as you'll be to pick those young plants, resist the temptation completely the first 2 seasons and as much as your willpower allows you to the 3rd season. Your patience will pay off in the long run as you'll enjoy these incredible vegetables for many future years. Asparagus is a fern that needs to grow and absorb as much sun as it possibly can the first couple of years to store up energy and build its' root system for future production. The more time you allow your plants to become established, the longer and heavier they will bear.

Harvesting and storage

Once you've waited until your 3rd or 4th growing season and your asparagus plants are strong enough to be harvested, snap all new shoots at the soil line in spring when they are about 8" tall.

If the spear has begun to open and develop foliage it will be too tough to eat, therefore be sure to harvest as often as possible, at least every other day and pick all grown spears each time you harvest. Stalks are ready to harvest when they are about 8" tall and thicker than a pencil.

Young plants may have a harvest season of a couple of weeks, while more established plants can produce as much as 8 weeks. A good rule of thumb is to harvest until the diameter of the spear decreases to the size of pencil, at which point you want to stop to let them gain strength for the next spring.

Once you have harvested your vegetable, enjoy immediately for optimum taste or refrigerate in plastic for about a week. If you choose to refrigerate, be sure to snap the stems before enjoying removing any tough fibers that have formed at the base of the spear due to the raise in humidity. Should you wish to freeze some asparagus to enjoy later, blanch them in boiling water for 3-5 minutes, douse in cold water, wrap and freeze.

Preparing for winter

Cut back the ferns once they reach 4' to 6' tall after the first frost when they've turned brown. Use this time, as the asparagus is dormant, to control any weeds. Keeping the bed weed free is important to avoid competition with your plants. Due to the richness of the soil, invaders can take hold quickly. Be sure to mulch for the winter months.