

GROWING ASPARAGUS IN YOUR GARDEN



Asparagus is a perennial vegetable crop. With proper care, you can expect yields for 15 years or more. It is suggested that you plant this crop at the edge of your garden because you do not need to till asparagus.

SOIL REQUIREMENTS

Fertilizer and lime should be applied according to your soil test. The pH should be 6.5 to 7.0, p_1 should be 50, and K test should be at least 260. Each year, top-dress about 1 to 2 pounds of 6-24-24 per 100 feet of row after the first harvest.

WHAT TO PLANT

Asparagus crowns should be planted instead of seed. Crowns are fleshy stems with established roots. It is suggested that you use one-year-old crowns.

Old standard varieties like Martha Washington are still available, but also consider the new all-male varieties.

Male hybrid varieties like Jersey Supreme, Jersey Gem, Jersey Giant and Jersey Knight have yielded well in several yield trials across the United States.

Varieties such as SNY53, SNY4-362, and Viking KBC, an "open pollinated" selection, plus California varieties such as Apollo and Atlas are available but still do not yield with the New Jersey hybrids.

Viola, a purple-spear cultivar, is susceptible to rust.

WHEN TO PLANT

Set crowns early in the spring when the soil can be worked. Fall planting is discouraged because spring plantings prove better.

HOW TO PLANT

Weed control is easier if you plant in rows. The trench should be at least 10 inches wide and 8 inches deep. Place the crowns about 12 inches apart with the buds pointing up. Cover the crowns with 2 inches of soil, adding more as the spears grow. This helps to destroy small weeds the first year. The final depth of the soil should be around 10 inches, resulting in the rows being about 2 inches higher than the ground level.



HOW MUCH TO PLANT

You can expect at least ½ pound of spears annually from each established crown. For average family table use, plant 25 to 50 feet of row. If you would like to freeze some, increase the row length accordingly.

HARVESTING

Asparagus should NOT be harvested the first two growing seasons. This delay in harvesting allows the crowns to develop and be more productive over time. In the third year, you can harvest for three to four weeks if the spear diameter is larger than a pencil. Spears may be either cut or snapped off at ground level. The fourth year, you can harvest for six to eight weeks. After harvest is over, continue to allow the ferns to grow throughout the season. Allow the tops to remain through the winter but remove them the next spring.

After harvesting, wash and refrigerate the spears. Asparagus is best used fresh but may be frozen if properly prepared.

WEED CONTROL

A 4- to 6-inch deep organic mulch like weed-free straw or sawdust will help with weed control. For a large asparagus planting, products like Karmex can be used for weed control. Be sure to use this product according to its label instructions. Home gardeners should rely on mechanical cultivation or mulch for weed control in a small planting. Salt is not recommended for weed control in asparagus.



INSECTS AND DISEASE

The principal disease of asparagus is rust. The best prevention is to select and plant varieties resistant to this disease.

Asparagus beetle can be controlled using Sevin or Rotenone. Refer to labels for harvest restrictions and application.

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