



J&L Garden Center

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and Garden Center

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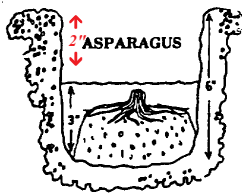
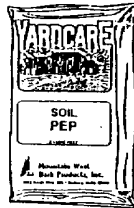
Growing Asparagus



Asparagus is one of the very popular home garden vegetables. It is easy to grow; you plant it once and harvest spears from the garden early each spring for 10 to 15 years. Besides over-wintered carrots and onions, asparagus is the earliest vegetable that can be harvested from the garden. A row of asparagus 50 feet long can easily supply enough fresh asparagus for a family of six.

Planting Asparagus

Asparagus is a permanent vegetable crop, not an annual crop. Soil preparation is extremely important when you first plant asparagus; you can't do it 'next time'. Spread four to six inches of composted mulch and five pounds of **6-10-4 Vegetable Garden Fertilizer** per 100 square feet of garden area. Roto till the area twelve inches deep.



Dig a trench six to eight inches wide and ten to twelve inches deep. Space your rows one to three feet apart. If you plant your asparagus roots deep in the soil you can harvest longer spears by cutting them, with an asparagus knife, deeper in the soil. The spears you harvest that are underground will be white, instead of green, and they will be very sweet.

Place your asparagus roots twelve to eighteen inches apart in the trench and dust them with **Bonide Garden Dust** to prevent insects and diseases from killing the tender roots. Spread the roots out and cover them with two inches of your soil mix. Do not fill in the entire trench when you first plant them.

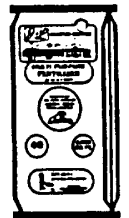


As new shoots begin to grow, gradually cover them with more soil to eventually fill in the trench (by the end of the summer the trench should be back to ground level). Be careful not to cover the new shoots with too much soil, or fill in the trench too fast, or the asparagus roots will die before they have a chance to establish their roots. Asparagus love water but be careful not to over water your new plants; the trench will collect water and too much water may drown your new plants.



Fertilizer and Water

Fertilize asparagus plants twice each year for maximum yield. Fertilize with either **16-16-8 Multipurpose Fertilizer** or **21-0-0 Ammonia Sulphate fertilizer** when you fertilize. Fertilize asparagus plants before they start growing, early in the spring, and then fertilize them again after you are finished harvesting them.

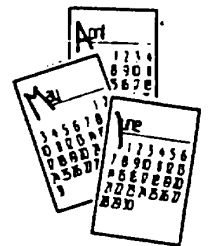


Don't skimp on water: asparagus love water. Asparagus grow naturally along ditch banks and streams. Heavy top growth is desirable, so give them plenty of water and fertilizer, and then watch them grow. **Caution:** Do not keep your asparagus plants soggy-wet all the time, they need to dry out between waterings.

Asparagus plants grow fast and can take over the entire garden if they are not kept under control. Plant them in an area where they can be confined naturally, or thin them out regularly.

Harvesting Asparagus

Don't cut and harvest asparagus shoots for the first two years after planting. The roots need time to build a reserve of energy. The third year should give you four to six weeks of cutting. Harvest shoots that are 1/4" to 1/2" thick and are 6" to 8" long. Cut them, or break them off, at or below ground level. Be careful not to injure the other shoots around them.



Asparagus shoots may need to be harvested every other day in the early spring and as often as twice a day when the weather gets warm. Do not let the shoots get too long or the flavor and quality will be greatly reduced.

Stop harvesting asparagus when the shoots begin to get smaller in diameter, when the

weather starts to get hot, when the flavor starts to diminish, or when the spears start to get woody. After the harvest season is over let the plants produce large, fern-like leaf stems for the rest of the summer. These leaves produce energy for the roots to store for next year's harvest. You can either remove the asparagus leaf stems after the frost has killed them in the fall, or you can remove them early in the spring; before new growth begins to appear.



Insect Control

The only real pest of asparagus plants is the asparagus beetle. This insect will not kill the plants but it makes the asparagus less desirable to eat, just like the little green worms that get into broccoli and cabbage. Clean up the asparagus patch and remove dead leaf stems and other debris in the garden to eliminate the winter hibernating areas for this asparagus beetle. You can dust or spray your plants with either **Bonide Eight®** or **Rotenone** to control this pest, if it becomes a problem. These two chemicals are both organic insecticides. They are safe insecticides that can be used within one or two days of harvesting.



Remember: Even organic insecticides are poisonous. Be sure to always wash your plants and your hands immediately after harvesting, and wash your plants again before you eat them.

Varieties

Two of the best varieties of asparagus to choose from are:

Mary Washington - This is the variety that every one has grown for the last three decades. It produces very sweet and flavorful spears. It is very hardy and easy to grow. This variety produces both male and female spears. The male spears are the thick stems that you harvest. The female spears are the thin spears with fern-like leaves that produce flowers and set seeds. The female spears are not edible and take away some of the stored energy, but they help produce the energy necessary for the next season's growth.



Jersey Knight - This is a fairly new variety that has been developed to produce more male spears and less female spears. The male spears are very large, sweet, and have a good asparagus flavor. The plants are not quite as hardy as Mary Washington and may need a little extra care to maintain their vigor. However, they are much more productive than the other varieties and are well worth the little "extra care".