

Asparagus

Growing & Harvesting

Grow. Plant one- or two-year-old crowns (stem and roots) in full sun six weeks before the last spring frost. Plant crowns 18-24 inches apart in trenches eight inches deep. Spread roots in bottom of trench and cover with 1-2 inches of soil. Gradually cover with more soil as growth progresses. Provide 1-2 inches of water every week, especially during first year, but do not overwater. Consider mulching in mid-summer to help control weeds. For more growing information look for the Extension MontGuide *Asparagus in the Home Garden* at www.msuxextension.org or contact your Extension office.

Harvest. Harvest in summer, only after the third year. Snap 6- to 10-inch long, pencil-thin spears close to the ground. Do not over harvest.

Selection

Choose odorless, pencil-thin to 1/2-inch thick asparagus spears with dry, tight tips. Avoid limp, wilted, or extra-large, woody spears.

Storage

Refrigerate asparagus up to four days by wrapping bottom ends of stalks in wet paper towel and placing in a plastic bag.

Nutrition Information

Most vegetables are rich in fiber and phytochemicals, but provide negligible amounts of saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, and sodium and are gluten-free. Asparagus is high in folate and potassium and is a good source of Vitamins K and A, with only 20 calories per half-cup serving.

Uses

Grill/Broil. Place asparagus in a plastic bag, drizzle with olive oil and low-sodium seasoning. Shake until asparagus is coated, then put spears on a preheated (medium-high heat) grill or under a hot broiler. Cook about 5-8 minutes until tender, turning occasionally.

Microwave. Place asparagus in a microwave-safe container with a small amount of water, low-sodium seasoning, and garlic. Cook for 3-4 minutes or until desired tenderness is reached.

Raw. Rinse and dry asparagus and enjoy as is, or in your favorite dip or salad.

Sauté or Stir-fry. Drizzle cooking oil in a heated pan. Add low-sodium seasoning with bite-size or one-inch pieces. Cook asparagus by stirring over high heat until desired tenderness, about 5-8 minutes.

Roast. Place asparagus in a plastic bag, drizzle with olive oil and seasoning. Shake until asparagus is coated, transfer spears onto a baking sheet or pan, then roast in oven at 400° F, about 5-8 minutes.

Season. To enhance flavor, season with allspice, basil, dill weed, ginger, marjoram, nutmeg, thyme or lemon juice.

Steam. Place asparagus in a pan with a small amount of water, low-sodium seasoning, and garlic. Cook on medium heat for 8-10 minutes or until desired tenderness.

Preserve. For more information on preserving asparagus, look for Extension MontGuides on: *Freezing Vegetables; Home Canning Pressures and Processing Times*. Visit www.msuxextension.org/nutrition and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension office.



Food Safety Tips

1. **Clean.** Wash hands and food contact surfaces before and after preparation.
2. **Chill.** Keep produce and food cool and chill promptly.
3. **Separate.** Keep produce and food separate from raw meats and eggs.
4. **Cook.** Cook food to a safe temperature.

Questions? Click on www.foodsafety.gov

Preparation: Step-by-Step



Wash hands. Thoroughly rinse asparagus to remove any dirt or sand.



Chop off white, woody ends. These ends have a tough texture.



If roasting or grilling, leave spears whole.



If sautéing or using in stir-fry, chop asparagus into bite-size pieces of about one inch.

For More Information:

Montana State University Extension: www.msuextension.org
MSU Extension Master Gardener: www.mtmastergardener.org
MSU Extension Food and Nutrition: www.msuextension.org/nutrition
MSU Extension Nutrition Education Programs: www.buyeatlivebetter.org

Information Courtesy of:

Fruits & Veggies More Matters. (2012). Asparagus: Nutrition. selection. storage. <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/asparagus>

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