

ASPARAGUS CARE & VARIETIES

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The key to growing asparagus is soil drainage. Asparagus needs deep, well-drained soil without hardpan or clay subsoil layers. Where roots are too damp when they are dormant, they die out rapidly. The best way we've seen a planting survive for long in heavy ground was grown in a giant, 4' tall sand-filled box made of full plywood sheets, atop the regular ground. The whole key to having a high-yielding asparagus bed is moisture and fertility during the growing season.

CARE

SOIL PREPARATION Plan ahead; start in fall. Dig out a 24" wide trench about 18" deep. If you're making a big planting, the row centers should be 5 feet apart. Neatly pile the soil besides the trench. Then blend in a couple inches of compost and refill the trench. Next spring, down the previously prepared row, dig out a 5 inch deep trench about on shovel wide.

PLANTING Plant in early-mid spring. The roots naturally grow in a fan-shape with the crown at the center. Spread them back out in that pattern in the bottom of the trench and cover with soil. Space the crowns about five inches below the surface. Never let crown root tips touch each other when planting (it is okay when they grow together later). Keep the bed well-weeded and well-watered.

MAINTENANCE Each fall, cover the bed with a heavy sprinkling of compost. Each spring, immediately after you have finished harvesting, sprinkle some fertilizer down the row to grow the ferns during the summer. The food the ferns store in the roots is what makes next year's harvest. Grow the ferns. Keep the bed well-watered and weeded. It is wise to remove female ferns before the seedballs drop or the bed will self-seed and get too thick with small crowns.

HARVEST Stop cutting when the size of the shoots tapers off. Harvest lasts only for a couple of weeks the first year; and established bed can be cut for a month before it begins to weaken. Then let the crowns rebuild their food reserves all summer.

VARIETIES

JERSEY KNIGHT This all-male variety boost high yields of top quality asparagus. These hybrid perennial plants are vigorous growers and highly disease resistant. Spears are large and attractive. Spear tips stay tight past the harvest, for weeks of delectable eating. Stalks are super tender.

SWEET PURPLE Deep burgundy spears! An extra-sweet, larger and more tender option to green asparagus. Spears turn green when cooked and have a mild, wonderfully nutty flavor. With a 20% higher sugar content, this variety can be eaten raw! The spears are less stringy than most varieties, which allows the cook to use the entire spear with little waste.