

# Asparagus



One of the most dependable and permanent home garden vegetables is Asparagus. Plants take 2 to 3 years to come into full production but then provide delicious spears every spring for a lifetime. Allow 1 dozen crowns per person in the household.

- Start by selecting a site that can remain undisturbed for many years. The edge of a garden bed often works best as a spot for growing asparagus. Be sure it gets 4-6 hours of full sun a day and is a spot that drains well. Asparagus do not like wet feet.
- Purchase crowns in spring as soon as your ground can be worked. Plant Land carries several types of asparagus crowns and buys from one of the country's premiere suppliers. Buy one dozen crowns for each asparagus eater in the household.
- Buy crowns no more than a day or two before you can plant them. Soak them overnight in water and do not allow them to dry out.
- Dig a trench 18" wide, 1' deep and about 12' long for one dozen crowns. Space rows of trenches at least 2' apart. Mix compost or well-rotted manure half and half with the soil from your trench. Mound the improved soil right next to the trench. You will use it to fill in the trench as the plants grow. To start, put about 6" of improved soil in the bottom of the trench and water it well. Place crowns 1' apart and spread the roots out evenly in a circle. Cover the crowns with 2" of improved soil and water thoroughly again.
- As the young plants grow, fill in the trench with the improved soil, taking care not to cover the growing tips. If they have grown 2" high, cover them with 1½" of soil. They grow quickly so you will need to check them every other day. Water deeply whenever the top inch or so of soil dries out.
- Do not harvest any spears the first year. The object at this time is to build root mass. When the plants turn brown in fall, cut all the stems to the ground.
- The following spring, you can harvest your first spears. Spears are ready to cut when they are 5-8" long. Cut at a 45° angle to the soil because flat cutting may injure adjacent developing spears. Cut for only 4-6 weeks or until the appearance of thin spears (about pencil diameter) indicates that the roots are nearing exhaustion. After that point, allow the plants to go to seed and enjoy the beautiful, airy fronds. You can also spread 2" of compost on the rows at this time to feed the roots.
- Each spring before shoots start to appear, top dress your asparagus rows with compost or well rotted manure. Add 2" and the spears will come up through it. Asparagus is a heavy feeder and needs the soil amended each year.
- Use grass clippings (without chemicals), straw or fine bark for mulch to prevent weeds. Very few pests bother asparagus but the plants cannot compete with weeds and will not thrive. Good weed control is important.
- If your asparagus bed starts producing spindly spears try a heavy dressing of compost and do not harvest for a season. If this does not bring back a better harvest you may need to re-do your bed but a well tended bed will produce for a dozen years or more before it needs a boost.