

GROWING ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is a perennial plant which will remain productive for 15 to 20 years. It likes a well-drained, slightly acid soil. Plant asparagus beds in a permanent location, to the side of the vegetable garden so that it won't interfere with annual spring tilling. Choosing a weed-free site will pay big bonuses in reduced maintenance in the future.

Asparagus is best grown from dormant one-year-old plants called crowns. Plant asparagus in the early spring or as soon as the soil can be worked. Dig a trench a foot wide and a foot deep for each row. Make the rows live feet apart. Pile the soil alongside the row and work in a generous amount of compost, peat moss, manure, or other organic matter. Mix in about five cups of a balanced garden fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 5-20-20 for each 50 feet of row.

Begin to refill the trench with 2 inches of soil. Set the crowns 12-18 inches apart and cover them with only 2 more inches of soil. Water well. As the shoots come up in the spring, fill in with more of the soil, taking care not to cover the young tips. By summer, the trench should be completely filled.

Do not harvest any asparagus the first year. The second year, a light harvest is possible on healthy plants. Beginning the third year, you may take a full harvest, removing all the young spears for about ten weeks through early July.

Fertilize each spring, before growth begins and again immediately following harvest, using the same type of fertilizer used at planting.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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