

How to Grow Asparagus

Unlike many of our other common garden vegetables, asparagus is a long-lived perennial, with a lifespan of 12-15 years or longer. It is the earliest vegetable ready to be harvested in your garden each spring, and is highly nutritious, loaded with vitamin A, C, riboflavin, phosphorus and calcium. It also freezes well so you can have fresh asparagus year-round!

Asparagus prefers:

Light:	Full sun
Soil:	Well-drained, deep sandy loam
Fertility:	Medium-rich
pH of:	6.5-6.8
Temperature:	relatively cool – 60-65 degrees
Moisture:	Average
Fertilizer:	Is a medium-heavy feeder. Provide with nitrogen annually in late winter-early spring. Benefits from a topdressing of compost each year.
Yields:	3-4 pounds per year, per 10 ft. row

Asparagus is not hard to grow once established, and is considered a very hardy plant. Asparagus can be started from seed or from 1-2 year old crowns. Seedlings can be transplanted outdoors in June and will need a year before they can produce, while purchasing older crowns will give you faster results.

Choosing the right location for your plants is important. They need an area with full sun and good drainage. To begin planting, you should start to prepare the bed as early in the season as you can. The plants will benefit from a bed amended with manure, compost, bone or blood meal, leaf mold, wood ash or a combination of these. Planting should be done in early spring, starting with a trench dug 12" deep. Start by spreading the roots of the crowns over a mound of soil, and then covering it with 2-3" of compost. As the plants grow, continue to cover them with about 2" of soil every 2 weeks until your 12" trench is filled in. Rainfall should be adequate water, but hand-watering should be done during drought.

Asparagus spears shouldn't be harvested until the second season after the crowns set. The second year, harvesting can be done lightly for about 3-4 weeks only, to help the roots become established. If you harvest your plants too heavily the first year, it will severely weaken them. Crowns started from seed should not be harvested until the third season, when it should be done lightly. When they are in their fourth season, you can begin to harvest for 8-10 weeks each year.

Weeding should be done in early spring to avoid breaking the spears. During the harvest period, spears that are 6-8" should be taken. Harvesting should be done by snapping the spears off just below the soil surface.