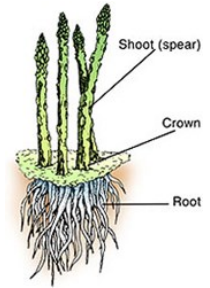


Asparagus

Asparagus is a long-lived perennial food crop with an extensive root system. Once established, you will enjoy the spears for 15-20 years.

Select firm, dense, disease-free 1 or 2 year old crowns from male varieties, such as 'Atlas'. Male plants are preferred for food production. Female plants produce ornamental red berries that take energy away from spear-production. You will want to plant about 12 plants per person in your household.



Asparagus can be planted when purchased bareroot in January thru March as long as the soil is workable and not frozen. Select a site with well-drained soil and prepare the soil by mixing in well-rotted compost or aged manure. It is best practice to create your asparagus bed on the north end of your vegetable plot so the large fern-like fronds of the asparagus plant do not shade the rest of the bed. Keep in mind that it has a massive root system and will not transplant well once established.



In Western Washington, it is best to create a raised berm about 12" high over which you'll drape the roots of the asparagus crown (see photo). This raises the roots out of potentially soggy soil and helps prevent root rot.

Space plants 12 to 18 inches apart in the row and space rows 5' apart. Cover the crowns with no more than 2– 3 inches of soil. Asparagus are drought tolerant once established but for the first year or two, water 1/2" per week. See additional readings below for more details on best watering practices.

You should NOT harvest any spears for the first three years. If the plants are growing vigorously, you can harvest sparingly the second year, but it is best to let the plant develop a strong root system for three years for the long-term production of the plant.

Harvest spears by cutting at soil level (never cut below the soil line) Cut with a sharp knife when spears are 6 to 10 inches long. When you first start to harvest spears, only harvest for 4 to 6 weeks in the Spring and then stop. In following years, harvest can be extended to 8 to 10 weeks. After the harvest period is over, let shoots grow for the rest of the summer. When the fronds turn brown in late Fall, cut all shoots off to the ground and cover with a 2-inch layer of chicken manure.

'Atlas' is a variety that does very well in the Pacific Northwest climate. It is extremely vigorous, develops large succulent spears, has excellent flavor and is resistant to rust, crown rot and fusarium. It also performs equally well in heavy, clay-like soils.

Additional reading:

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2083/2022/04/04-17-GrowingAsparagus-Steen.pdf>