

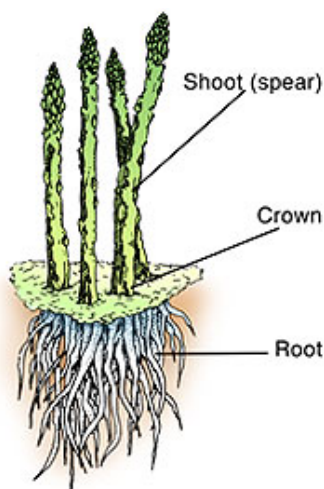


ASPARAGUS TALKING POINTS

2. A Spear of History about Asparagus

- Asparagus has been cultivated for more than 2,500 years by people worldwide. It continues today to be a universal vegetable, grown and consumed in Asia, Europe, South America, North West Africa, and North America.
- A tomb from 3000 BC, found in Egypt, has a fresco painting with a bunch of asparagus tied together, like we do with it today.
- A perennial member of the Lily family, asparagus is also related to onions, leeks and garlic. Derived from the Greek word *aspharagos* meaning “sprout” or “shoot,” asparagus was known as *sperage* and referred to as “sparrow grass” by English-speaking Europeans until the late 19th century.
- Asparagus cultivation began more than 2,500 years ago by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Asparagus was valued both as a food and for medicinal remedies.
- After the Roman Empire fell, asparagus lost some of its popularity in Europe, but Syria, Egypt, and Spain continued to grow this nutrient rich vegetable. Then in the Middle Ages asparagus was brought back to Europe where it returned to its status as a delicacy.
- Early English and Dutch colonists brought asparagus to North America.
- 1852, migrant family workers started growing asparagus in the Stockton-Sacramento Delta.
- Thomas Foon Chew built the first cannery to package green asparagus in Isleton, California in 1919.
- Beginning in the 1950s, U.S. farmers began to grow more green asparagus than white due to consumer preference.
- In the mid-1980s, fresh asparagus was shipped worldwide for the first time by airplanes from California.

3.& 4. How does Asparagus grow? What season do we pick Asparagus



Crowns are planted in sandy soils.

They are not harvested the 3 first years after planting.
They need to establish strong fibrous roots.

Early in the season (which is spring and summer) there may be 4-5 days between pickings. As the days and nights get warmer they may even be picked every 24 hours.



Asparagus can grow 10" in 24 hours!

Each crown will send spears up for about 6-7 weeks.



After harvesting, the spears grow into ferns which produce red berries and the food and nutrients that are necessary for next year's crop.

- Asparagus is a long-lasting perennial plant (about 15 to 20 years) that requires about three years from time of planting to establish permanent roots and produce quality spears.
- The plants are most commonly grown from one-year-old crowns (an underground stem from which the spears shoot), providing a crop more quickly than if grown from seed.
- The edible stalks are shoots that develop into fern-like plants in warmer temperatures if uncut.
- Asparagus requires a period of dormancy. This dormancy occurs naturally during winter when cooler temperatures inhibit plant growth. In the first year, it is essential for ferns to develop and for the spears to not be harvested in order for the roots to develop.
- Asparagus can be harvested in three different colors: green, white and purple. Green asparagus is most commonly grown. White asparagus is grown by burying the crowns under a foot of soil preventing photosynthesis. Purple asparagus spears

turn green when cooked. While there are several varieties of each color, they are most commonly marketed by their color (e.g., *green asparagus*, etc.).

- Asparagus is harvested by snapping the spears off at the ground level when they are 6 to 10 inches tall. This will result in less damage to un-emerged spears and less chance of introducing disease into the plant than the traditional harvesting method of cutting the spears below the ground level. It is desirable to harvest at least every other day during cool weather and every day during warm weather to prevent spears from growing too tall.

5. Why should we eat Asparagus?

- One serving of green asparagus provides:
 - An excellent source of Vitamin K and folate (a B-complex vitamin helps with providing the body with energy).
 - A good source of Vitamin C.
 - A source of the antioxidants glutathione and rutin, precursors to Vitamin A.
- Asparagus is a source of many vitamins, including both water-soluble and fat-soluble vitamins. Water soluble vitamins are excreted through urine and fat soluble vitamins remain in the body for future use. Fat soluble vitamins include Vitamins A, D, E and K.
- According to the National Cancer Institute, asparagus contains more glutathione than any other fruit or vegetable. This antioxidant plays an important role in the prevention of certain cancers and diseases, nutrient metabolism and regulating DNA and protein synthesis. (Antioxidants and Vitamin E can be described as soldiers or a knight that fights off bad things in the body. The soldiers and knights are in the body so when DNA is damaged or there are invaders that want to destroy cells the antioxidants or vitamin E destroys it before it can cause harm. They are protectors.)
- A kind of interesting fact that kids may want to know is that asparagus makes your urine smell, this strange occurrence happens in as little as 15 minutes from the time someone eats this vitamin rich vegetable. As your body breaks down the vegetable it releases a sulfur containing chemical into the kidneys that then is released in urine and it has a very distinct smell. This happens to everyone; however, not everybody is able to smell it. Some people smell it and some do not, it just depends.
- Fiber is also very abundant in asparagus. Just by looking at the little strings inside the stalk you can see the fiber. These thick stringy fibers help clean out your digestive system. Like the fighters, antioxidants and vitamin E, fiber clears out your digestive system so that bad stuff does not stick around long enough to cause harm to your body.

6. How do you pick good Asparagus?

- Select bright green asparagus with closed, compact, firm tips.
- Wash asparagus in cold water.
- Stand stems up in a container with about one inch of water. Cover loosely with plastic bag.
- Store asparagus in the refrigerator for up to three days.
- Wrap the bottoms of the asparagus stalks in a damp paper towel and place in a plastic bag.

- Make sure asparagus tips stay dry during storage.

Facts

- Asparagus cooks fast — Roman Emperor Augustus coined the phrase “velocius quam asparagi coquantur” which means “faster than you can cook asparagus.” Over the years, this has been shortened to “in a flash.”
- Per one-half cup serving, asparagus has the highest content of folate of any vegetable.
- Ancient and medieval medicinal practices used crushed asparagus tips to reduce swelling and alleviate pains associated with bee stings, wounds and infections.
- In proper conditions, asparagus can grow as much as one inch per hour — up to 12 inches in one day.

Helping Your Child Eat Healthy

- Bake, grill, boil, steam, microwave or stir-fry asparagus spears.
- Add cooked asparagus to soups and salads.
- Dip raw or lightly cooked asparagus spears in low-fat vegetable dressing.
- Help your child find a healthy recipe with asparagus. Then cook it together.
- Ask each family member to pick a fruit or vegetable to plant in the garden.
- Remind your child to eat breakfast every day to help stay focused in school.