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Asparagus Planting and Culturing Guide

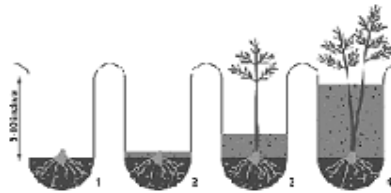
Asparagus grows best in fertile soils with a pH of 7.0-7.2. Choose a permanent, sunny location with well-drained soil. It is best if you prepare the site a year in advance by removing all perennial weeds and applying lime if needed to adjust the pH. A soil test should be done to check that the soil is in the correct pH range and that it contains high levels of phosphorous. For best results make any soil pH adjustments before you plant.

Planting

In early spring, apply 5 pounds of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet and incorporate thoroughly in the soil. Plant in furrows which are 6-8 inches deep, depending on your soil type. 8 inches is the best depth, for most soils, but 6 inches is recommended for heavy clay soils. We recommend bone meal or super phosphate and lime **incorporated thoroughly** at the bottom of the planting furrow.

Set plants 12 inches apart in the row and space the rows 4 feet apart. Lay crowns along the bottom of the furrow and cover with 2-4 inches of soil. **Do not add compost until plants are growing** (Stage 3).

As the spears grow up through the soil and expand into fern, gradually fill in the trench. Using this method helps to keep down small weeds. Within six weeks, the furrow should be completely filled. (see illustration)



No compost until Stage 3

Fertilizing

In the establishment year in addition to the spring fertilizer application, side dress in early August with 1 pound of 10-10-10 (or equivalent) per 100 square feet and lightly work into the top inch or two of soil.

Bed Maintenance

In the early spring of the 2nd year, cut the old ferns down to ground level. Control weeds all season and irrigate as needed. Be on the lookout for asparagus beetles. These insects can cause considerable damage to an established bed. Aphids and the asparagus miner are also pests to check for. For chemical weed and pest control recommendations, contact your local Cooperative Extension office.

In early spring of each succeeding year, follow the same routine except increase the fertilizer to 2 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet. Side dress again after harvest with 2 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. Test your soil pH every 3-4 years to maintain a pH of 7.0-7.2. Broadcast lime according to the soil test results and recommendations.

Harvesting Spears

Research shows that you can begin to harvest asparagus the year after establishment, cutting all the first spears that appear for a period of 7-10 days. (Once spears begin to get spindly, stop harvesting.) The second season is similar, except that you can harvest all the spears that appear for a period of 4 weeks. By the third year, you can cut for the full season, which is usually about 8 weeks long.

Be careful not to damage emerging spears when cutting below the soil surface. An alternative to cutting is to snap the spears. Make sure you snap stalks off close to the soil surface so as not to leave stubs of asparagus. Stubs can be potential entry points for pests and diseases. Always maintain good growing conditions after harvest, keeping the planting weed and insect free. Do not remove any ferns. They will die back naturally in the fall. Mulching the dried ferns in early spring with your lawn mower will reduce weed pressure. With a little care you should enjoy an asparagus bed for many years.