

✧ Renee's Garden ✧

ASPARAGUS PLANTING AND GROWING GUIDE

Your long-lasting, perennial asparagus bed will be an attractive permanent garden feature for many years. Properly cared for, you will have plentiful harvests of delicious spears every spring, followed by lacy, rich green ferns that form a handsome landscaping backdrop.

PLANTING

Plant out your asparagus roots after all danger of frost is over, as frost will kill young shoots. Choose a permanent full sun location for your asparagus bed. Asparagus thrives best in well-drained, rich soil with a pH of 7.2 or higher. Remove all weeds and fork over the soil very thoroughly. Prepare planting furrows 6 to 8 inches deep and 3 feet apart to receive your new plants. Incorporate bone meal or super phosphate into the soil at the bottom of the planting furrows according to the package directions.

Lay the roots horizontally along the bottom of the furrow: space green Jersey Knight roots 12"-14" apart along the furrow; space Purple Passion roots 8" apart. Cover with 2-3" of soil, and water well.

As the spears emerge and begin expanding into lacy green ferns this first growing season, mix in 50% well aged compost into the soil as you gradually fill in the furrows. Over 5-6 weeks, furrows should be completely filled. Keep well weeded, but weed by hand and do not cultivate with heavy tools.

WATERING

Keep your asparagus bed well irrigated, but not soggy. Plan on at least 1 inch of water per week during the growing season and 2-3 inches per week when harvesting. Test moisture level regularly by putting your first finger into the soil. If the top 1 inch of soil feels dry, water the bed. Remember sandy soil will need more regular moisture than heavy clay soil.

WEED CONTROL & MULCHING

Throughout asparagus plants active growing and harvest periods, stay on top of weeding chores: weedy asparagus beds inevitably result in poor harvests. Your asparagus ferns will die back naturally in the fall. Mulch after harvest season to reduce weed pressure and protect the soil in your asparagus bed.

HARVESTING SPEARS

Do not remove or cut any asparagus spears during the first growing season, except if there is an unexpected late frost, remove any spears that have turned brown. All asparagus spears will grow into pretty asparagus ferns. Let them grow through the first planting season. The next spring, cut the old ferns down to ground in the early spring before new spears begin to emerge. Be sure to retest soil to make sure its pH is about 7.

Recent research shows that you can begin to lightly harvest asparagus spears the first year after establishment. Cut or snap all 5"-8" spears that appear for a very short period of just 8-12 days. Make sure you cut or snap stalks off flush with the soil surface, not below it. Do not leave stalk stubs sticking out of the soil, as they can be potential entry points for pests and diseases.

The second season after planting, you can harvest all the spears that appear for a period of 3-4 weeks. When spears begin to get spindly, immediately stop harvesting for the season and allow all new spears to develop into ferns which feed the crown, resulting in bigger, fatter, more numerous spears the next season.

By the third year after planting, you can harvest for the full season, which is usually 6-8 weeks long.

MAINTENANCE

After your first growing season is over, plan to add fertilizer to your asparagus bed every growing season in early spring. Apply 10-10-10 fertilizer or choose a similar all purpose organic fertilizer and apply according to package directions in early spring and again following harvest. You will find many good organic fertilizers available at a good independent garden center or online.

PESTS

Lookout for asparagus beetles and their larvae, aphids and the asparagus miner. These insects can cause serious damage to an established bed. For pest control recommendations, contact your local Cooperative Extension office. To locate, use this site: <http://npic.orst.edu/pest/countyext.htm>