

ASPARAGUS

Varieties we offer:

Mary Washington – \$1.00 per crown – Most popular strain; standard commercial strain. Long straight green spears with tight purple tips. Exceptional flavor, high yields. Resistant to rust and blight, very hardy. 70%-30% male/female. Zones 3-7.

Jersey Knight F1 hybrid – \$1.00 per crown – Variety hybridized to produce primarily male and very few female plants (male plants don't use energy to make seed, so are often more vigorous). High quality, bright green, delicious spears with tight, deep purple tips, 5/8 in. thick, 8-10 in. tall; very productive plants. High level of resistance to rust; good resistance to fusarium root and crown rot; perform well in heavy or alkaline soils. Zones 3-10.

Purple Passion F1 hybrid – \$1.00 per crown – Beautiful, plump, purple spears that are sweeter (sugar content is 20% higher) and more tender than green asparagus. Stalks turn green when cooked. Disease resistant. 50%-50% male/female. Zones 3-7.

You will need about 10 crowns per family member for table use, 25 for table use plus preserving; half that if only male plants are used.

If possible, prepare your asparagus bed in the fall before spring planting. Asparagus roots do not like to touch each other or uncomposted material, so fall preparation means that your amendments should be well incorporated into the soil by spring planting time.

The most common way of planting asparagus is in a trench, 12-14 inches deep. Enrich the soil with plenty of organic material dug into the trench.

Plant the crowns 12 inches apart, with the buds pointing up. You may want to plant them on little hills of soil or compost, to keep the roots spread and crowns and roots not touching their neighbors (this prevents mold). Cover with soil to a depth of 2-3 inches. As the plants grow, keep covering the spears so that just the tips are exposed, by adding soil and mulch and organic material, till the trench is filled.

Do not harvest any asparagus the first year, the second year, harvest just the largest spears, and only for two weeks, then in the third year you can harvest for six to eight weeks. When you cut the spears, snap them off at ground level, so as not to injure spears that have not come up yet.

Note: you can also grow asparagus from seed. In that case, you would plant seed for crowns the first year, plant the crowns in a trench the second year and not harvest, third year harvest only the largest for two weeks, fourth year harvest for six to eight weeks.

You don't want to harvest all your asparagus, because if you cut all the spears, the crown will die. Be sure to leave some spears on the plant – the smallest ones. Let the ferny plants grow all summer till they are browned by frost. Cutting them off too soon will reduce next year's harvest.

Every year a new crown forms over the old asparagus crown, so the plant inches closer to the surface. Asparagus crowns like to be covered by at least 5-8 inches of soil; forcing their way through the soil thickens the spears. For this reason, it is a good idea to top dress the bed with more soil about every 3 years.

Companions for asparagus: basil, parsley, calendula, tomato, asters, dill, coriander (cilantro), marigolds. Asparagus is said to dislike onion, garlic, potatoes.