

ASPARAGUS 2024

Varieties we offer:

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

Millennium F1 hybrid – 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). Plants are productive, long lived, cold and heat tolerant, and grow well in a wide range of soil types, including the clay soil which is so common in the Treasure Valley. Bright green spears with tight, purple tips are tender and delicious. Moderate rust resistance. Zones 3-9. An excellent substitute for Jersey, which is no longer available.

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.