

# The Arrival of Asparagus

The name asparagus, came from the Ancient Greeks, who used the term to describe all tender shoots that were picked and savored.

Historically, it was even used to treat swelling and arthritis. The American Indians dried asparagus to make medicine.

Romans prized asparagus for its flavor, texture and medicinal qualities. Romans were of the first to cultivate it and to preserve it by freezing. The Roman conquests spread asparagus to other areas.

In the 16th Century asparagus gained popularity in France and England. From there it was brought by the colonists to America. Asparagus is grown all over the world and is considered an international food. It is also referred to as the "Food of Kings."

## Another Way to Say ASPARAGUS:

*Spear grass, spargel, esparrago, asperge, asparago, espargos*

### FACTS:

- Asparagus is a perennial
- An almost leafless member of the lily family
- It is related to garlic and leeks
- The spears we buy at the store are actually the shoots from an underground crown



### Spring Salad with Roast Chicken

Ingredients:

*5 asparagus spears, cut into 2 inch pieces*

*2Tbsp. sun dried tomato dressing*

*1/2 C chopped cooked chicken*

*1 oz. Monterey Jack Cheese, cubed*

*1 tomato, cut into wedges*

**Place** asparagus spears on microwavable plate with 1/4 cup water; cover and vent. Microwave on High for 1 min.

**Spoon** dressing into individual salad bowls

**Top** with chicken, cheese, asparagus, and tomato. Toss lightly

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## Fresh Facts

# Asparagus



**Here's the skinny  
on asparagus...**

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## Good for You and Good for Me



Asparagus is a highly prized vegetable which has many health benefits. Among the list of valuable attributes, asparagus contains folate which is essential for a healthy cardiovascular system and is also critical to the unborn baby during pregnancy. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, "when a woman has enough folic acid before and during pregnancy, it can help prevent major birth defects of her baby's brain or spine." Asparagus also contains potassium, fiber, vitamins A, B6 and C. Need another reason to eat asparagus? Try it! Asparagus offers all of these benefits and is fat-free, cholesterol-free, and delicious.

Most asparagus produced in the U.S. is grown in California and Washington. Peru, Mexico and Chile export asparagus to the U.S. Peak season for asparagus in the U.S. is January through May.

### Nutritional Profile

A 5.3 ounce serving (approx. 5 spears) has only 20 calories, 0 fat, or cholesterol, 5 milligrams sodium, 400 milligrams of potassium, 3 grams of fiber, 60% of USRDA of folacin, and are excellent sources of thiamin and vitamin B6.

### IT'S WORTH THE WAIT.....

Three seasons pass before asparagus can be harvested. In its first season of growth a crown forms with six inches of root. In the second season the crown grows a fern. Asparagus can be harvested in its third year, and reaches its prime after 6-8 years.

### SELECTION AND STORAGE

Asparagus stalks should be rounded and neither fat nor twisted. Look for firm, thin stems with deep green or purplish closed tips. The cut ends should not be too woody, although a little woodiness at the base prevents the stalk from drying out. Once trimmed and cooked, asparagus loses about half its total weight. White asparagus has a milder flavor than green asparagus, and is available at times. There is also purple asparagus that has a fruitier flavor, but like the white asparagus is not as available as the green asparagus.

Use asparagus within a day or two after purchasing for best flavor. Store in the refrigerator with the ends wrapped in a damp paper towel, and be sure to place the asparagus in the back of the refrigerator away from any light, since folate is destroyed by exposure to air, heat or light.

### Sautéed Asparagus

Ingredients: *Asparagus, garlic, olive oil, parmesan cheese, salt and pepper, onions*

Heat the olive oil and garlic over medium heat. Add asparagus and onion. Stir fry it for around 10 minutes, until its tender, but crisp. Salt and pepper it to taste. Then remove from the heat and sprinkle with cheese.



### Asparagus in IOWA:

- Statewide yields have been from 800 to 1,400 lbs/acre. Jersey Giant and UC 157 have yielded 4,000 or more lbs/acre in research trials.
- Early spring (April) is the best time to plant an asparagus bed in Iowa.
- Typical growing season is around 6 weeks.
- Home gardeners should harvest around 3 to 4 lbs/10 feet of row.
- Farmers Markets are the biggest outlet for the sale of asparagus in Iowa.