



Asparagus— A long term investment!

A well prepared, well cared for asparagus bed can be productive for ten years or more!

AT-A-GLANCE

pH: 7.0 - 7.2

In-row spacing:
12"-14" between plants
6'-8' for Purple Passion

Between rows: 3'

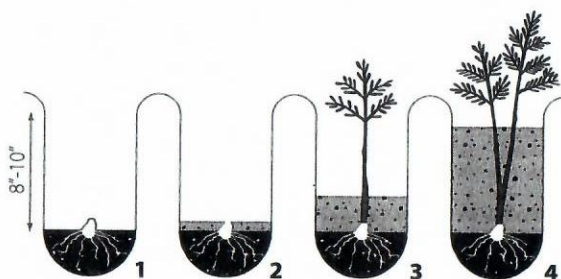
Planting

Asparagus does not like to be transplanted once established. Choose a permanent, sunny location with well-drained soil. Don't plant too early because a frost will kill new shoots.

It is best if you prepare the site a year in advance by removing all perennial weeds. At least 2-3 weeks prior to planting, incorporate 5 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. in the early spring. Have a test done to check that the soil is in the correct pH range and that it contains high levels of phosphorous. Application of lime may be needed to adjust the pH.

Dig a furrow 8"-10" (the same depth and width as your shovel) deep. For heavier, clay-like soils 8" is recommended. (See diagram below, stage 1) We recommend bone meal (½ lb. per 10' row) or super phosphate and lime spread thoroughly at the bottom of the planting furrow. Lay roots along the bottom of the furrow with the crown facing up and cover with 2"-3" of soil. Do not add compost until plants are growing (See diagram below, stage 3).

As the spears grow up through the soil, above ground level, and expand into fern, gradually fill in the trench, using up to 50% compost with soil. Using this method helps to limit small weeds. Within six weeks, the furrow should be completely filled. (See diagram below, stage 4)



PLANTING CROWNS

1. Set crowns upright in wide furrows, 8" - 10" deep, with roots spread.
2. Cover with 2" of soil. Do not add compost!
3. and 4. gradually fill the furrows adding up to 50% compost to soil as the plants grow.

Irrigation

Plants need a well-drained site. Lighter soils may require more frequent watering than heavier soils, which retain moisture better. Maintaining moisture during establishment year is very important.

Fertilizing

In the establishment year: Do not add compost or fertilizer until plants are growing. In addition to the Spring fertilizer application, side-dress in early August with 1 lb. of 10-10-10 (or equivalent) per 100 sq. ft. and lightly work into the top 2" of soil.

In succeeding years: use 2 lbs. 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. in early spring, and again following harvest. Use of lime, bone meal, and super phosphate helps maintain ideal soil.

Weed Control/Mulching

Ferns will die back naturally in the fall. Mulching the dried ferns with a mower in the spring will reduce weed pressure. Check with local extension before using chemical products. If tilling the soil, only till ½"-1" of the soil surface. Deep tilling can damage your crowns and stir up weed seed.

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 additional 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 but increase the fertilizer to 2 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. 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 3-4 weeks. By the third year, you can cut for the full season, which is usually 6-8 weeks long.

TIPS: During harvest, asparagus roots need 2"-3" of water per week and before the soil gets too dry. If frosted, tips become brown. Remove the spear immediately to prevent further set back of planting.

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 with freezing temperatures. Use the dried ferns in early spring as a mulch to reduce weed pressure. With a little care you should enjoy an asparagus bed for many years.

