



GROWING ASPARAGUS



Asparagus is a popular vegetable that can be successfully grown in New York home gardens. A desirable aspect of asparagus culture is that annual planting is not required because once the crop is fully established in three years, it can be productive for 12-15 years or more if given good care.

Since asparagus is a perennial crop, it should be planted at the side of the garden so that garden plowing and cultivation of annual crops can be accomplished. Gardeners using large garden tractors to prepare the garden soil and cultivate crops may find an asparagus bed in the middle of the garden to be more convenient.

HOW MUCH TO PLANT

Each crown planted will produce about one-half pound of spears annually when fully established. In small gardens 25 to 50 feet of row will supply the average family with enough asparagus for table use. For freezing and canning as well as fresh use, increase the row length or plant additional rows.

WHAT TO PLANT

Asparagus plantings can be established by using either seed or crowns. Crowns are fleshy stems with an established root system. In order to save time in establishing the planting, it is suggested that one-year old crowns be planted rather than seed. Crowns are available from garden centers and some seed houses. The Jersey Giant, Jersey King, and Jersey Knight varieties are recommended for planting in New York gardens.

WHEN TO PLANT

Set the crowns as early in the spring as the soil can be worked. Under Central New York conditions, spring plantings have usually given better results than plantings in the fall.

SOIL REQUIREMENTS

Asparagus grows best on well-drained soils where the pH is above 6.0. Before working the soil, spread four pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-10 for every 100 feet of row.

Asparagus plantings will also greatly benefit from the addition of composted organic matter. Till this material in deep or spread it in a trench where the crowns are to be planted.

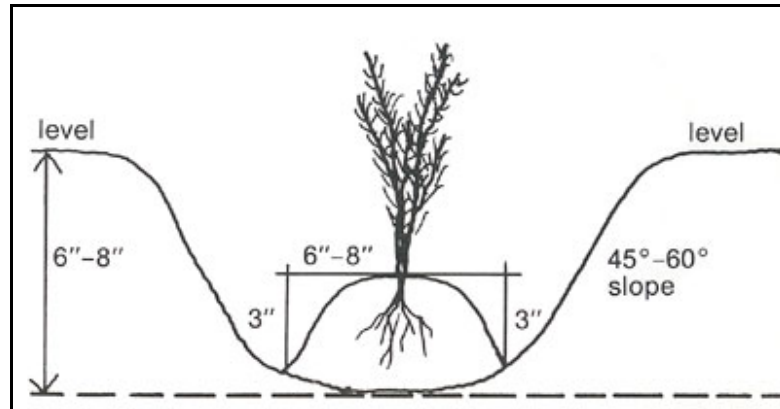
HOW TO PLANT (see diagram on page 2)

Plant the crowns in rows to make weed control easier to accomplish. After marking off the row, furrow or spade out a trench at least 10 inches wide and 6-8 inches deep. Place some loose soil in the bottom of the furrow. Place the crowns 18 inches apart in the bottom of the furrow with the buds pointing up. Spread the roots well across the furrow. Cover the crowns with two inches of soil initially. Gradually fill the furrow as the spears grow. By

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using this procedure, small weeds growing in the furrow can be covered and killed. The final depth of soil cover over crowns should not exceed 6 inches in clay soils or 8" in lighter, more sandy soils.



HARVESTING PERIOD

No asparagus should be harvested during the first two seasons. By making no harvests until the crowns are well developed, they will be more productive over a longer period. A few spears may be harvested the third season. Only cut spears for about three weeks, however, during the first harvest season. During the fourth and subsequent seasons cutting may be continued for 4-6 weeks.

Discontinue harvesting when the spear diameter decreased to a diameter smaller than that of a lead pencil. After harvesting, allow the fern growth to develop and build up the crown for a good crop the next season. Allow the tops to remain over winter. Remove them by cutting at ground level the next spring before growth resumes.

HOW TO HARVEST

The spears should be snapped off (not cut) when they are 6-8 inches tall. The snapping avoids the danger of cutting other young roots and eliminates some trimmings in the kitchen.

OTHER CULTURAL PRACTICES

To promote vegetative growth, applications of nitrogen fertilizer can be made in the spring just prior to resumption of growth and in the late spring or early summer after harvest is discontinued. Suggested rates are one-half pound of nitrate soda or one-quarter pound of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row. Avoid contact of the fertilizer with the plants as "burning" could occur.

A 4-6 inch deep organic mulch of materials such as weed-free straw, damaged hay, or sawdust will aid considerably in weed control in the planting. In larger plantings, herbicides such as Treflan, Karmex, Princep, or Dowpon can be used for weed control. However, these materials must be used strictly in accordance with label directions and it is suggested that the home gardener rely chiefly on mechanical cultivation and mulches for weed control in a small asparagus planting.

DISEASES AND INSECTS

The principal insect and disease problems of asparagus are rust and the asparagus beetle. To avoid rust, use resistant varieties such as Jersey Giant, Jersey King, and Jersey Knight. For beetle control apply a dust of carbaryl (Sevin), malathion, or rotenone. Do not use these insecticides within one day before harvest.

Cut the plants down in the fall only after they have turned yellow or brown. Cutting earlier may weaken the plants.

For additional information visit Cornell's web site at

<http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/cropindex.htm>

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