

# Planting Asparagus

The taste of freshly cut asparagus is an unforgettable experience. New male varieties are now preferred for quality and quantity. Within three years these crowns will produce bountiful crops of tender spears.

Asparagus crowns, can occasionally have mold on the soil around the crowns because they have been kept in storage

after being lifted from the grower's fields. Just wash this off if you see it, and keep the crowns cool and moist until they are planted in the garden. If you cannot plant them right away, and you can't heel them in outside, it is best to store them covered with potting soil in a bucket, planter or even a wheelbarrow in a garden shed or basement.

## 1. planting

Choose a place in the garden with good drainage and full sun where the asparagus can grow undisturbed for 10 to 12 years. For some home gardens, we recommend that crowns are planted in rows 2 1/2 to 3 feet apart.

Soak the bare root crowns in water for one hour prior to planting.

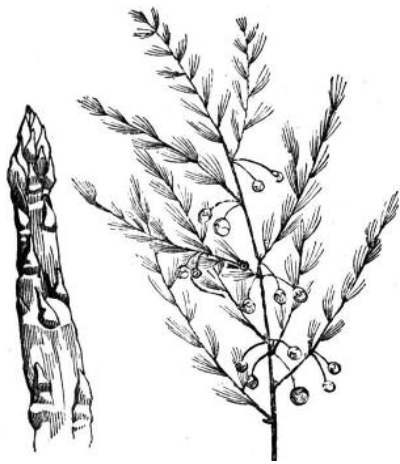
Dig planting holes or trench 6 inches deep by 12 inches wide. Plants should be planted one foot apart from the center of one crown to the center of the next. Loosen soil and add compost, rotted manure, leaf mold or a good organic all-purpose fertilizer. Work amendments well into the soil at the bottom of the hole or trench.

Make a mound at the bottom of the hole or trench and place the crowns over the mound so that the buds are pointed up and the roots are spread out evenly in the hole like the spokes on a wheel.

Cover the crowns with three inches of soil, then water in well. Keep the soil moist but not soggy until the tiny spears emerge from the soil. Depending on the temperature at planting time, it can take from 2 to 6 weeks for them to come up.

When the plant is 10 to 12 inches tall, fill in the row with soil so that the ground is level. Keep weed-free and fertilize with an organic all-purpose fertilizer in the fall.

To plant asparagus plants in pots follow the same directions, except top of plant should be 2" below the surface.



## 2. harvest

Do not cut the asparagus at all the first year. It is important to let the plant grow undisturbed to build a good root system for future production. Let the asparagus grow into ferny foliage. Continue to water the plants all summer and into the autumn if natural rainfall is not sufficient. The fern and cane (or stalks) will turn a golden color and die with a heavy frost. Do not disturb the cane until it naturally breaks away from the crown, then remove and mulch the entire asparagus bed with organic material for overwintering.

The second spring, cut a few spears from each plant over a 2 week period. Harvest by cutting with a sharp knife at soil level. Continue to water when the rest of the garden needs watering during the season.

The third spring, you can cut the fresh spears over a 3 to 4 week period. Subsequent years, cut over a 6 to 8 week period. You can tell when it is time to stop harvesting when the spears emerge from the ground with tips that don't look smooth as usual, but with tiny buds already developed, causing a bumpy appearance. This means the asparagus spears need to keep growing up into stalks and foliage to nourish the roots.

The asparagus crowns rebuild their strength in the summer and fall for the next year's crop so it is important not to let the asparagus plants dry out. Each year the plants will produce new buds so that in 5 or 6 years a single row will grow to be 18 to 24 inches wide. Continue to keep the bed weed-free and well-watered. Fertilize every spring and add organic mulch after cleaning up the bed in the fall.

