

Each vegetable has its own personality and its own likes and dislikes. This alphabetical listing of individual vegetables will guide you to success and satisfaction.

ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is a perennial, which means that it will come back year after year. Remember that a perennial bed must stay in the same place for a long time, so you should give careful thought to its location. Once an asparagus patch is established, it is very difficult to work the soil there very thoroughly. Be sure to add all the humus, manure, and organic matter you can when you prepare the bed, because the plants may be there for twenty years or more.

I'm sure you know that asparagus is only harvested in the spring when the young shoots come up. In the summer and fall, the ferns must be allowed to grow very tall as they go to seed. The seeds come in lovely, bright red berries, and the feathery ferns make a fine hedge. But be careful not to put the bed in a spot where the ferns will shade shorter garden plants.

You can raise asparagus from seed, but it is better to buy roots that are one or two years old. You will get asparagus much more quickly this way. Asparagus grows in most types of soil, but it does best in sandy loam. Drainage is important; asparagus cannot survive in water-logged earth. An annual application of fertilizer will keep the bed in good condition. I recommend about ten pounds of 10-10-10 for every 200 square feet.

If you live in the North, set out asparagus roots in the early spring. In the South, they should be set out in the fall. Plants should be set about one foot apart, with four feet between rows. A 100-foot row is enough to feed a family of four.

Planting asparagus takes a bit of work, but it is worth doing right. You won't have to do it again for twenty or thirty years if you take care of the bed properly. Dig a trench about a foot deep and about a foot and a half wide. In the bottom of this trench, make little mounds of earth combined with compost, manure, or fertilizer. Space them about one foot apart. Make the mounds tall enough to place the "crown" of the plant, the point where the roots converge, about three inches below the top of the trench. Drape the roots, like a skirt, over the mound. Once all the crowns are positioned properly, fill in the trench and firm the soil. Each crown should be covered with about three inches of gently compacted soil.

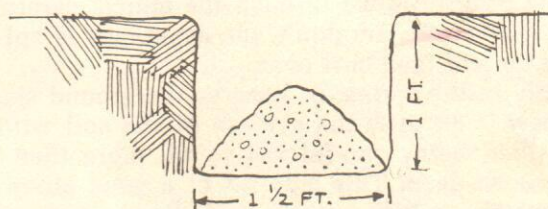
A week or so after planting, rake the top of the bed to destroy whatever weeds may be growing there. Be careful not to cut or disturb the asparagus

crowns. Some people like to mulch young asparagus with hay, leaves, or some other kind of organic matter. This is not a bad idea, but don't mulch until the asparagus is up.

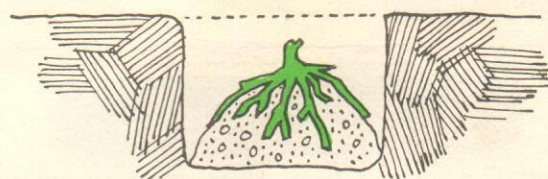
Expect no harvest at all the first year. Leave the plants alone throughout the summer and fall; do not cut the ferns until the dead of winter. Better still, don't cut them down at all. Wait until spring. The ferns are very important to next year's crop of asparagus.

You can harvest very sparingly the second spring. Pick or cut shoots for a week or so, then allow the ferns to grow freely again. Harvest only those that are as big around as your thumb. The shoots are at their prime when they are six to eight inches tall. If they are small and skinny, about the size of a pencil, leave them alone and let them grow. They will produce a crop for the following year. During the third spring, you can harvest liberally for four to six weeks. Normally, you can plan to harvest asparagus for five to ten

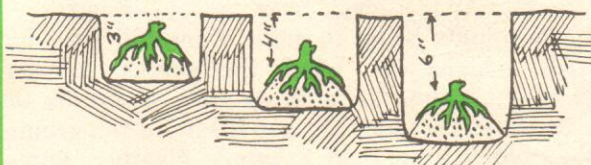
ASPARAGUS PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS



Mound up a mix of soil and compost, manure, or fertilizer in bottom of planting trench. Space mounds 1 foot apart.



Drape asparagus roots over mound, leaving crown 3 inches below top of trench. Fill trench and firm soil.



To extend the harvest, plant crowns at 3 different depths. The deepest plants will send up shoots last.

weeks in an established bed, depending on your location.

I've discovered a few tricks that allow me to extend my harvesting time. I plant my asparagus at different levels. In one-third of my asparagus bed, I dig a deep, deep trench. Here I plant the crowns six or seven inches below the surface. In the next third of the patch, I come up a couple of inches so that the crowns are about four or five inches beneath the surface. In the last third, I plant the crowns two or three inches deep.

In the spring, the plants that are closest to the surface send up shoots first. I get a very early harvest from these. Those that are a little deeper come along a little later, and those that have been planted six or seven inches below the surface come up later still. I find that I can prolong the harvest for an extra three weeks this way.

You can do the same thing with mulch. Lay about four inches of fairly heavy mulch over your entire bed. Leaves will work fine, especially if they are chopped. Early in the spring, pull the mulch away from about half of your patch. The asparagus will come up much more quickly where the soil has been laid bare. The mulched soil in the rest of the bed will stay cool longer, and this will hold back the growth of the asparagus. As soon as shoots begin to poke through the mulch, carefully rake it away. If you don't, the asparagus is apt to come up and then curl over.

Early in the spring, as soon as the ground starts to thaw, I go over the surface of the soil with a roto-tiller, being careful not to till more than an inch or so deep. This gets rid of a good share of the weeds, grinds up the old ferns, and adds organic matter to the soil. I find that this is one of the best times to fertilize because I can really see what I am doing. If fertilizer is added in the fall, the nitrogen in the 10-10-10 seems to disappear into the soil and lasts no longer than about a month. Fertilizing in the spring helps to assure a bountiful harvest.

BEANS, POLE

The nicest thing about pole beans is that you can easily raise a lot of them in very little space. All you have to do is cut some poles about eight feet long, stick them in the ground about three feet apart, and plant five or six seeds in a circle around the base of each pole. The seeds should be six to eight inches away from the pole itself.

As the plants begin to grow, they will send out tendrils which will wind themselves counter-clockwise around the pole as they climb to the top. Be sure that poles are set firmly in the ground so they won't blow over in windy weather. Sometimes you will have to direct the bean tendrils toward the pole. They have been known to grow in the wrong direction—away from the pole.

Pole beans live up to their name. They will not interweave themselves through horizontal wires;



Pole-bean vines like to wrap themselves around vertical supports like the pole above. If planted near horizontal objects like wire fence or the strings below, the vines will twist tightly around one another for support, as you can see in the photograph.

