

ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is a perennial crop and with some planning to properly place and amend the bed, you will be rewarded with a bountiful harvest for years!

Planting. Choose only one-year old crowns. “Crowns” are dormant finger-like roots, and are the best way to start asparagus. We sell UC157, a commercial-grown variety that is very hardy for our area. Crowns are best planted in early spring. Asparagus beds can live for years so proper bed preparation is essential. Asparagus requires well-drained soil, so amend the bed with plenty of compost. Asparagus crowns are planted first in trenches and gradually more soil is added through the season until the crop is level. So, start by digging a trench 6-8 inches and plant each crown 12-15” apart in rows 4-5’ apart. Deeper planting produces fewer, larger diameter spears, while shallower planting results in thin, spindly spears. Cover crowns with 2-3” of rich soil and continue to cover the emerging shoots with soil as they grow.

Care. Perennial vegetables do require some maintenance to ensure a good harvest. First, control weeds. Weeds compete with the plant for water, light and nutrients. Regular fertilizer is also important – apply Chickity-Doo-Doo, once a month. The ferny tops should not be removed from the plant until after a killing freeze. The tops photosynthesize and transfer food to the roots for a vigorous crop next spring! The tops can be left on to act as mulch and protect the roots through the snowy winter.

Harvest. The first few years are the “establishment years”. The vigor of an asparagus planting depends on the food reserves transported to the roots during the previous season.

The first year: Do not harvest from your crowns.

The second year: Limit your harvest. This means the harvest should be light – only 2-3 weeks. If the spear size becomes pencil thin and spindly, reduce your harvest or stop completely.

The third year: You may be able to harvest for much longer, even 6-8 weeks.

Our harvest here in Kansas and Missouri, is usually from mid-April to the first of June. Spears will grow faster and fuller in hotter temperatures. In cool springs, you may need to harvest every three days. In hot years, you may harvest every day. Harvest spears that are still tight and 6-8 inches long. The best method is to snap the spear above the soil surface. Snapping severs the spear between the green, edible part and the white woody tissue below ground. You risk less injury to the plant when you use your hands instead of a knife.

