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## GROWING ASPARAGUS IN THE HOME GARDEN

Asparagus is a popular vegetable that can be successfully grown in Ohio home gardens. A desirable aspect of asparagus culture is that annual planting is not required because once the crop is fully established (3 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 conveniently accomplished. Those 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.



**SOIL REQUIREMENTS** - Lime and fertilizer applications to the soil are best made using the results of a soil test as a guide. Your County Agricultural Extension Agent can assist you in making arrangements for a soil test and in obtaining recommendations as to any needed lime or fertilizer application. Plow or spade the soil at least eight inches deep in the spring as soon as the soil is dry enough to work. On level garden areas where erosion is not a problem, fall plowing or spading would be desirable. Any lime, fertilizer or manure to be worked into the soil is best applied prior to plowing, spading or tilling. This will insure that the materials are well mixed throughout the soil mass prior to planting.

**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. The Martha Washington and Waltham Washington varieties are recommended for planting in Ohio gardens.

**WHEN TO PLANT** - Set crowns as early as the soil can be worked. Under Ohio conditions, spring plantings have usually given better results than plantings made in the fall.

**HOW TO PLANT** - Plant crowns in rows to make control easier to accomplish. After marking off the row, furrow or spade out a trench at least 10 inches wide and 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 2 inches of soil initially. Gradually fill in the furrow as the spears grow. By using this procedure, small weeds growing in the furrow can be covered and killed. The final depth of soil over the crowns should not exceed 6 inches in clay soil or 8 inches in lighter, more sandy soil.

**HOW MUCH TO PLANT** - Each crown 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.

**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. During the fourth and subsequent seasons, cutting may be continued for 6 - 8 weeks. Discontinue harvesting when the spear diameter decreases to 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 may be either snapped off or cut off with a knife at ground level. When using a knife, avoid deep cutting which may injure the crown or developing spears.

**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 Martha Washington. For beetle control, use Tomato Vegetable Dust or Rotenone.

**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 of soda or one fourth pound of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row. Avoid contact of the fertilizer with the plants as "burning" could occur. A four to six inch deep organic mulch of materials such as weed free straw, damaged hay, or saw dust will aid considerably in weed control in the planting.



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