



GARDEN STATE ON YOUR PLATE

ASPARAGUS

RECIPES



GARDEN STATE ON YOUR PLATESM IS A PROJECT OF THE PRINCETON SCHOOL GARDENS COOPERATIVE, PRINCETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND POMPTONIAN FOOD SERVICE, WITH GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM BENT SPOON, WHOLE EARTH CENTER, LILLIPIES BAKERY, AND CHURCH & DWIGHT EMPLOYEE GIVING FUND. THE PROGRAM BEGAN IN 2010 WITH FUNDING FROM THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION.

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History

Historians say that the cultivation of asparagus likely originated in Mesopotamia (the area centered between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers), and present-day Iraq, along with regions in Europe, Asia and northern Africa. The earliest known depiction of asparagus is on an Egyptian frieze dating to about 3000 BC.

It's said that Queen Nefertiti named it the "food of the gods." The Greeks and Romans dried it for winter use; Cato's "De agri cultura" (160 BCE) mentions asparagus. Emperor Caesar Augustus (63 BC–AD 14) of Rome ordered the military to collect asparagus, some of which was taken into the Alps, where it was frozen for later use.

Asparagus officinalis, aka...

The word asparagus derives from Persian asparag or sprout, and the Greek asparagos, then, by way of medieval Latin to — sparagus. It was shortened to sparage in Late Old English and then further modified to asperages in Middle English. It was anglicised to sperach or sperage in the 16th century. Asparagus also is known by the folk name sparrow grass or sparrow root.

Around the World

Asparagus has naturalized in temperate regions around the world. Asparagus grows wild along the seashores and riverbanks of North Africa and Asia, and it's said, so abundantly on the Russian steppes that cattle graze it like grass. Asparagus was introduced in England by the Romans and then forgotten. However, French monks preserved cultivation techniques, and it regained favor when Louis XIV ordered gardeners to grow asparagus in his Versailles hothouses. In England, it returned during the reign of Henry VIII and became a delicacy. Asparagus roots were brought to US by European settlers in the early 1650s.

Words for Asparagus

Latin: asparagus

Arabic: نويجه

Cantonese: 筍

French: asperge

Haitian Creole: aspèj

Hindi: शतावरी

Italian: asparago

German: spargel

Japanese: アスパラガス

Persian: مېوچرام

Spanish: espárragos

Ukrainian: спаржа

Art & Literature

"That fascinated me would be the asparagus, tinged with ultramarine and rosy pink which ran from their heads, finely stippled in mauve and azure, through a series of imperceptible changes to their white feet, still stained a little by the soil of their garden-bed: a rainbow loveliness that was not of this world."

~ Marcel Proust, "Swann's Way," 1913

Botany

Asparagus is a perennial plant belonging to the family Asparagaceae. It is an edible shoot, commonly called a spear, that emerges early in the spring from an underground crown. The female plants produce berries. Feathered fern-like foliage and flowers indicate the end of the plant's season.

Season's Best

The height of the commercial asparagus season in New Jersey stretches from April to May, and edges into June, weather permitting. To harvest, break spears off by hand near the soil level, when they are 6 to 10 inches long, taking care not to disturb nearby crowns that may be generating spears as well.



In the Garden

Asparagus usually is planted in May so that foliage (fern) develops before winter. Plant asparagus in fertile, well-draining, and sandy soil, in full sun.

Asparagus takes three years from planting until first harvest. After that, those plants will produce a crop in early spring months for about eight to 15 years.

Companion/guild plantings: Strawberries, dill, basil, parsley, marigolds, peas, eggplant.

Math & Money

The main asparagus-producing country is China, followed by Peru, Mexico, and Germany. Asparagus from the Caborca region of Mexico is one of the biggest suppliers in the North American market. The US is the seventh-largest producer; New Jersey ranks 4th, nationally. The Garden State's asparagus crop brings in ~\$10 million to \$11 million annually. Most asparagus in the Garden State is grown in Salem, Gloucester, and Cumberland counties.

Ingredient Pairings

Classic combinations with asparagus include capers, ham, and shrimp; cayenne and lime; garlic, ginger and sesame; lemon, olive oil and black pepper; morels and ramps; Parmesan and eggs; hazelnuts and Parmesan. William III of Orange (1650-1702) is said to have taught Jonathan Swift how to eat asparagus in the Dutch manner (with a sauce of melted butter poured into a hard-boiled egg sprinkled with ground pepper and nutmeg).

In the Kitchen

Trim each spear about an inch to remove the woody portion, either with a sharp knife or by finding the spot on each spear where it snaps off readily. Rinse vigorously by swishing heads in cold water to remove stray bits of sand and soil.

Asparagus can be eaten raw, blanched, fried, roasted, sauteed, steamed, and stir-fried. In every case, keep the cooking very short. Roman Emperor Augustus reportedly coined a phrase for quick tasks: "velocius quam asparagi conquantur" (faster than you can cook asparagus).

Fuel for Learning & Powerful Play

Asparagus is rich in Vitamin K, folate, and vitamins A and C. It contains asparagusic acid, which turns into sulfur compounds that can be smelled during urination for up to 12 hours after eating, but only about 60% of people can detect it. Can you?

Climate Impact

Eat asparagus from local farms and in season. Otherwise, transportation, if it's air freight, produces six times the amount of greenhouse gases than the next-highest vegetable, avocado. The USDA says that air-freighting takes 50 times the energy of shipping by sea, 33 times that of rail transport, and four times that of truck transport.

Resource Intensity

Eat asparagus from local farms and in season. Asparagus is a water-intensive crop, and though it is a perennial, it yields fewer edible pounds of food per acre than staple vegetables like potatoes or broccoli – so more land per serving.

Asparagus Tasting

Begin with unseasoned raw or roasted asparagus (425 degrees for 5 minutes on a sheet pan). Then season with a pinch of salt. After observing how seasoning changes the flavor, taste with a drizzle of vinaigrette. If available, compare and contrast different methods of cooking beyond roasting: Steamed, boiled, sauteed, and with relevant flavorings.

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Pomptonian and Zone 7

Tossed Pasta Salad with Roasted Asparagus

This adaptation of a Pomptonian recipe works well as a side dish for dinner or for picnics. Dress lightly to allow crisp-tender asparagus and sweet, crunchy red pepper to lead, flavor-wise. Save remainder of dressing for leafy green salads or to toss with roasted potatoes and other vegetables.

Serves 6

Ingredients

3 cups hot cooked pasta (bowties are ideal)

1½ cups roasted asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces

1½ cups diced red pepper

Dressing

¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil

⅓ cup fresh squeezed lemon juice or red wine vinegar

1 clove garlic, minced or smashed

1 teaspoon dijon mustard

½ teaspoon dried oregano

½ teaspoon dried basil

½ teaspoon dried parsley

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Preparation

1. Place hot pasta in large mixing bowl, along with roasted asparagus and diced red pepper.
2. Make dressing: Place olive oil, lemon juice or vinegar, garlic, mustard, oregano, basil, parsley, salt and pepper in sturdy jar with secure lid. Shake to emulsify. Taste & adjust seasonings.
3. Drizzle a portion of dressing over the salad, tossing gently to distribute. Add dressing by the tablespoon, as needed.



Pomptonian and Zone 7 Parmesan-Roasted Asparagus

Serves 6

Ingredients

1½ pounds trimmed asparagus
3-4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Garlic powder, if desired
½ cup fresh-grated Parmigiano Reggiano
Salt
Fresh-ground black pepper

Preparation

1. Heat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Arrange asparagus on large sheet pan; drizzle with olive oil.
3. Scatter grated cheese across the spears; sprinkle with salt and fresh-ground pepper.
4. Roast for 4-5 minutes, or until asparagus is bright green and crisp-tender and cheese is beginning to soften.



City Tavern Cookbook, adapted by Torey Avi

Marinated Asparagus

"Thomas Jefferson had a square in his Monticello garden reserved for asparagus; it was one of the few vegetables for which he documented a cultivation technique (the plants were mulched with tobacco leaves). Jefferson recorded its seasonal arrival at his Monticello table 22 times, usually in early April. The Monticello kitchen blended Southern Virginian cooking styles with Continental cuisine and reflected the African cooking influences of his enslaved staff."

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1 ½ lbs trimmed asparagus
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- ½ cup olive oil
- Pinch of fresh thyme
- Pinch of chopped fresh parsley
- 1 egg hard cooked and chopped
- ½ small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp fine capers, drained

Preparation

1. Wash the asparagus and trim the tough ends of the stalks. In a large saucepan, bring 2 quarts of lightly salted water to a boil over high heat. Place the asparagus in the water and cook until just tender, 2-3 minutes.
2. Drain asparagus. Add enough cold water to cover the asparagus. Let stand about 5 minutes, until the asparagus is cool.
3. Drain again and pat the asparagus dry with paper towels. In a medium-size mixing bowl, whisk together the vinegar, oil, thyme, parsley, egg, onion, and capers, and salt and pepper to taste.
4. Place the asparagus on a serving platter. Pour the vinaigrette evenly over the asparagus. Let the asparagus marinate in the dressing for a few minutes (optional). Garnish with additional chopped egg and parsley, if desired. Serve at room temperature.

<https://www.pbs.org/food/recipes/marinated-asparagus>



Apicius, adapted by Andrew Coletti of Pass the Flamingo

Aliter Patina de Asparagis

Marcus Gavius Apicius (1st century AD, during the reign of Tiberius), likely author of the cookbook "De Re Coquinaria," also known as "Apicius," included asparagus in the collection of recipes.

Andrew Coletti writes: "The presence of pepper in the recipe hints at the intended audience of Apicius: enslaved or formerly-enslaved career chefs laboring in the kitchens of the wealthy. In Rome, pepper (known in three forms, black, white, and long) was a costly dried import from India."

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 pound trimmed asparagus
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- ¼ cup cilantro leaves
- ¼ teaspoon ground black or long pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried savory or sage
- ⅛ teaspoon celery seed or lovage
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil (plus more for the dish)
- ½ cup white wine
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 6 eggs

Preparation

1. Heat the oven to 400 °F.
2. Spread the inside of a one-quart gratin dish, pie dish, or cast-iron skillet with oil.
3. Puree all the ingredients except the eggs in a food processor or a mortar and pestle.
4. Beat the six eggs and add them to the pureed vegetables. Mix well to combine, and pour the mixture into the dish.
5. Bake until set (about 35-40 minutes, or until a fork or chopstick inserted into the center comes out clean. Serve with fresh cracked pepper.

<https://passtheflamingo.com/2017/05/10/ancient-recipe-asparagus-patina-roman-4th-century>



Suzy Karadsheh, The Mediterranean Dish

Roasted Asparagus with Dukkah

"Dukkah (duqqa), pronounced doo-kah, is a traditional Egyptian blend of nuts, seeds, and warm spices. It's been around since the age of ancient Egypt, but it is now widely popular throughout the Middle East and the world. Egyptians actually pronounce it dua'ah. And translated from the Arabic, it simply means "to pound." That's because traditionally, it is made by pounding a mixture of toasted nuts, seeds and whole spices in a mortar and pestle until they form a coarse, crunchy mixture."

Serves 6

Ingredients

1½ pounds trimmed asparagus
½ cup hazelnuts
3 tbsp almonds
4 tbsp white sesame seeds
3 tbsp shelled pistachios
1 tbsp fennel seeds
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp cayenne pepper
kosher salt

Preparation

1. Heat oven to 425 degrees. Scatter asparagus across baking sheet; drizzle with olive oil.
2. Place the hazelnuts and almonds in a dry cast iron pan. Toast briefly over medium-high heat, tossing regularly, until the nuts gain some color (watch for nuts to turn a nice golden brown). Transfer to a side dish.
3. Place the sesame seeds in the same skillet and return to the heat. Toast over medium heat, tossing regularly, until the sesame seeds turn golden brown (this will be fairly quick so watch carefully).
4. Add the toasted nuts and sesame seeds to the bowl of a small food processor fitted with a blade. Add the pistachios, fennel seeds, spices, and a generous dash of kosher salt. Pulse for a few seconds until you reach a nice coarse mixture. Do not over process the dukkah. The mixture should be crunchy and not too fine.
5. Liberally dress asparagus with mixture, saving remainder for serving at the table, alongside a small bowl of extra virgin olive oil and your favorite bread for dipping.
6. Roast asparagus for 3-6 minutes, until aromatic but retaining its bright green color.
7. Store leftovers in a tight-lid jar for up to 2 weeks to use as a topping for salad, soup, chicken, meats, or other roasted vegetables

<https://www.themediterraneandish.com/dukkah-recipe/>

