



# ASPARAGUS

## What is It?

- Asparagus is part of the asparagaceae family and is related to several popular flowers, like bluebells, hyacinths, and hostas.
- While green asparagus is most common, it can also be white or purple!
- Asparagus plants can live at least 25 years but have been known to live up to 100 years.



## Grow It

- Asparagus stems are called "spears." Rather than planting asparagus seeds, many gardeners purchase and plant asparagus "crowns," which are one-year-old asparagus root systems. After planting, it takes three years for asparagus spears to be ready for a heavy harvest. Mature plants can grow up to 10 inches in one day!
- Here are some asparagus growing tips from the Washington State University Master Gardener program:
  - Plant asparagus crowns early in the spring.
  - Choose a sunny garden spot to plant your crowns.
  - Do not pick spears in the first year after planting so they can establish strong roots. They will grow into tall bushy ferns which can be left in place.
  - During the second year, spears can be lightly harvested when they are about eight inches tall by cutting stems just above the soil level. This should only be done for a period of three weeks. After that, spears should be left to mature in place.
  - During the third year, harvest similarly, for up to six weeks
  - In the fourth and subsequent years, harvest spears for about eight weeks. Yield will increase each year for the first seven or eight years and will begin to decline slightly after about ten years.
  - Once established, plants will produce every spring for many years!

[Find more tips here.](#)



**Make It**

**Recipe: Roasted Asparagus**  
Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 pound fresh asparagus spears</li><li>• 1 tablespoon vegetable oil</li><li>• 1 dash each of salt and black pepper</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.</li><li>2. Rinse asparagus spears and trim off tough ends. Leave whole or cut into shorter lengths. (tip: ask kids to help. They can snap off the asparagus ends by hand, or use scissors to trim them)</li><li>3. In a large bowl, toss spears with the oil, salt, and pepper.</li><li>4. Place spears in a single layer on a large baking sheet.</li><li>5. Roast for 12 to 15 minutes or until the asparagus pieces are lightly browned. Thick spears will take a longer baking time.</li></ol>

Notes  
Try adding more seasonings such as lemon zest or garlic powder.

Recipe adapted from Oregon Food Hero: [Roasted Asparagus](#) | [Food Hero](#) | [Recipe](#).



**Make It**

**Recipe: Ginger Almond Asparagus**  
Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 pound asparagus, rinsed and trimmed</li><li>• 1 teaspoon vegetable oil</li><li>• 3 tablespoons slivered almonds</li><li>• 1/4 teaspoon salt</li><li>• pinch of black pepper</li><li>• 1/4 teaspoon sugar</li><li>• 1/8 teaspoon ground ginger</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Slice the asparagus diagonally into pieces about 3/4 inch long.</li><li>2. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add remaining ingredients. Stir and sauté until asparagus is a bright green, 3 to 5 minutes.</li><li>3. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and cook until the asparagus is just fork-tender. Avoid overcooking. Shake the pan a few times while cooking to prevent sticking or burning.</li><li>4. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.</li></ol>

Recipe adapted from Oregon Food Hero: [Ginger Almond Asparagus](#) | [Food Hero](#) | [Recipe](#).



Asparagus at the Farmers Market, credit: WSDA



## Eat It

- Asparagus is an excellent source of Vitamin B9 (folate), a vitamin that helps make new cells. Folate is important for people of all ages but is especially important for developing babies during pregnancy.

## Read It

- Gus the Asparagus, by Ann-Marie Finn and Kaylene Hobson
- The Might Asparagus, by Vladimir Radunsky

## Play It

Enjoy the coloring activity on the next page from Oregon Food Hero.

## Find It

- Washington asparagus is available at many grocery stores. Check the product label or shelf tag to see where a product is grown. Asparagus can be found fresh, frozen, or canned. It is also commonly found at Washington state's many farmers markets, farm stands, and other local markets from late March to June.
- When selecting asparagus, choose odorless, bright colored, firm stalks with dry, compact tips. The thickness of the spears doesn't affect fresh asparagus flavor, texture, or tenderness, though thinner spears will cook faster than thicker ones. Store asparagus in the refrigerator for up to three days. To improve storage quality, wrap the base end of asparagus spears in a wet paper towel before refrigerating.
- Search for local farms and markets that sell Washington-grown asparagus here: [Washington Food & Farm Finder - Eat Local First](#).
- Find a farmers market near you here: [Find a Farmers Market - Washington Farmers Market](#). Many farmers markets and vendors accept WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefit, and SNAP Market Match.



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I like asparagus because

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