



ASPARAGUS SPEARS

Asparagus is one of the few perennials in the vegetable and fruit garden, the others being rhubarb and strawberries. Like them, asparagus offer the pleasure of a crop to enjoy year after year. A well-cultivated asparagus bed can produce for 20 seasons or more. One must have patience initially, as asparagus is not ready for harvest until the second or third year after planting.

LOCATION

When planting asparagus, select a sunny location that is sheltered from strong winds. Keep it in rows to one side of the garden so that care and cropping of annual vegetables will not disturb the roots. Well drained soil is essential.

HOW TO PLANT

Root crowns can be planted in early spring. Dig a trench, which is 8-10 inches deep, 12-18 inches wide and allow 25 feet for 12 plants. If you are planting more than one row, they should be spaced 3-5 feet apart. Mix the removed soil (from trenches) with plenty of organic matter such as well composted manure and peat moss. The peat moss is an excellent addition due to its slightly acid nature, which asparagus prefers. Fill the trench with 5-6 inches of the soil mix, tamp it down, place roots (spread out crown side up, 2 feet apart) and cover them with 2-3 inches of soil. Keep filling the trench gradually, as the spears grow. (By autumn the bed should be level with the surrounding area).

HARVEST

Asparagus should be harvested the second or third year after planting.. The first years the stalks should be allowed to develop into bushy fern-like stems. These should not be cut, they are essential in producing food which goes back to the root and will produce the thick shoots for next year. Harvest asparagus when they are 5-8 inches tall and the buds are still very tight and under the scales. Sever stalks about 3 inches below soil surface. Stop harvesting when the spears grow thin. Do not cut the thin ones, let them run their course as previously mentioned. Support the fronds if necessary. In autumn the ferny shoots should be cut down to within 2 inches from the ground when they have yellowed.

FERTILIZER

When planting asparagus add 4-12-85 to the trench (5lb/75 feet of row). Thereafter fertilize with 4-12-8 in spring (before spears appear) and fall.

MAINTENANCE

Keep beds clean by frequently hand-weeding or hoeing gently so as not to disturb the roots. Remove berries that form on the ferny fronds before they fall to the ground. Mulching around the plants will help keep the weeds down and moisture in.