

PLANTING ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is one of the few vegetable plants that is a perennial. Successful asparagus cultivation requires time, space, and patience. Asparagus is not usually harvested until the third year, but healthy plants can produce a crop for 20 years or more.

Soil Preparation

Asparagus prefers slightly acidic, but mostly neutral, soil. Add plenty of organic matter to your soil to make a light fluffy mix. Nature Life Composted Cotton Burrs are an excellent choice for increasing that organic matter. To amend your soil and prepare for planting, dig a trench 18-20 inches wide and 10-15 inches deep. To the soil you have removed, you will add a mixture of either a 5-10-5 fertilizer (about 5lbs per 75 feet of row) or an organic fertilizer such as Espoma Garden Tone and plenty of organic matter, such as Nature Life Composted Cotton Burrs. Mix this fertilizer-organic matter mixture well into the soil in order to make a light, fluffy, well-drained soil. Planting instructions are in the next section.

Well-draining soil is essential for successful asparagus growth. The plants will quickly die if their roots are allowed to sit in water. If your soil is heavy with clay (most of our soils are), you should incorporate some sand or peat moss to increase drainage. This will help reduce the potential for disease. If water tends to pool in the area you have chosen for your asparagus, you might reconsider the spot for planting the asparagus. If it's an elevation issue that has caused water to pool, you might be able to raise the bed by adding extra soil, etc. Remember this is a long-term investment, your diligence now will pay off later, and for years to come.

Planting

You may plant by root, seed, or seedling. Planting by seed takes an extra 2 years before harvest. Asparagus needs at least half a day of good sunlight, but prefers full sun. Also, plant in a well protected area, as the plants can be damaged by high winds. Asparagus will grow 4-5 feet tall and will spread to 6ft or more, so the rows/trenches should be 5-7 feet apart. For better success in root growth, soak the asparagus roots in liquid seaweed over night before planting. Try to plant your asparagus rows parallel to the prevailing winds, to reduce wind damage to plants. To have a good amount to eat when harvest time comes, plant 20-40 plants per person.

If you are planting root crowns, fill the trench with your amended soil to about 6-8 inches below ground level. Press the soil down and plant the crowns 2 feet apart within the trench. Initially, cover the crowns with only 2-3 inches of your soil mix. After the plants sprout, add more soil gradually until the trench is full. Seeds are best started indoors, one per peat pot in a sunny location, and transplanted when they are about 12 inches tall. Seedlings should be planted 2-3 inches deep in prepared beds.

Fertilization

Feeding with a 5-10-5 fertilizer every 2-3 months will help increase growth rate. Fertilize each spring and fall. For an organic approach, add 1-2 inches of compost over the growing space every year. You can also side dress with Espoma products or water with a mixture of fish emulsion and liquefied seaweed once every 2-3 weeks.

Watering

Make sure to keep your soil evenly moist, but not wet. Because soils vary, you will have to watch your growing space to know how often to water, but two to three times a week should be sufficient. Mulching the asparagus with Eucalyptus Mulch will help with keep the soil more evenly moist in our windy area, and decrease the frequency of watering, as well as naturally repel insects. It will also help cut down on weeds in your growing bed.

Growing instructions

In the fall, when the leaves have died and turned brown, cut off the top growth to ground level and mulch the bed. Asparagus crowns grow about an inch upward every year. If the asparagus crowns end up too close to the surface your yields will decrease dramatically. Every spring, or in the fall before mulching, mound about 1-2 inches of soil over the bed to keep the crowns well covered.

Harvesting

Harvest time is in late spring to early summer. You may harvest some spears the second year of growth, but waiting until the third year allows the plants to develop a better root system which will be better in the long run. Be very careful not to harvest too much even in the third year. Harvest only over a two-week period at this time and don't harvest all the spears during the season. The remaining spears will produce foliage for the plant. The fourth year you may extend the time of your harvest to a period of four weeks, again allow some of the shoots to produce foliage. In the fifth year, you may harvest a full eight-week period. Remember every year to allow some of the shoots to produce foliage.

When you harvest, choose spears that are 6-10 inches high. The best way to safely harvest your asparagus spears without damaging your asparagus plant is to use your fingers to snap the spears off at ground level. Using a knife to cut the spears may damage the crowns, so using your fingers is best. There are also special asparagus knives that are available for purchase at the nursery.

Storing

Asparagus tastes the best when it's fresh, but you can refrigerate it for one-two week. To store in the refrigerator, stand the spears upright in a dish with 1-2 inches of water in the bottom. Make sure the spear tips don't get wet, or they will rot. Can or freeze surplus spears. Spears should be cooked before canning or freezing. For more tips on vegetable storage, contact your local Agriculture Extension Agency.

If you have any question please call, write or drop by:

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