

Home grown asparagus is very hard to beat - and its so good for you!

Asparagus can be grown from seed, but most often it is grown from bare-rooted crowns – root systems made up of fleshy rhizomes. It takes about three years for the seeds to develop a crown, and about 2-3 years for the spears growing from the crown to be of a harvestable size. BUT – don't let that deter you. If you purchase bare-rooted crowns you only have to wait a year or two, and the wait is well and truly worth it. Once established your asparagus can reward you for up to 30 years!



GROWING ASPARAGUS

1. Location

Ideally asparagus should be planted in full sun, in a friable rich soil, So if you have a heavier clay type soil, be sure to dig in some well rotted compost or manure.

2. Sowing Seed

Ideally you want to start your asparagus seed indoors, as the tiny fronds that grow in the first year or so are very delicate and would easily get lost in an outdoors garden bed. Plant the seeds about 5cm deep and keep them moist. Be patient, they can take up to 30 days to germinate. If you are planting in trays you can separate them into pots when the fronds are about 15cm tall. Keep them moist and every now and again sprinkle some slow release fertiliser on the top of your pots. You can plant them into the garden after about 18 months to 2 years.



3. Sowing Crowns

Asparagus crowns are planted in late winter or early spring. Dig some compost or well-rotted manure into the bed where you plan on growing it and make your holes about 20cm deep and about 30cm wide. In the bottom of the hole you need to make a small mound. Place the bare-rooted asparagus crown on top of your mound and carefully spread the rhizomes evenly around the outside. Now back-fill your hole until you have about 5cm soil on top of the crown.

4. On Going Care

Asparagus are notoriously hungry plants, so they will need lots of feeding. I like to top-dress my plants with more manure or compost in spring, just prior to the first spears coming through the ground, and again in autumn as the plants start shutting down.

Asparagus plants are male and female. The female plants produce red berries on their fronds, and don't produce as many spears as the male plants do.



5. Harvest

The initial spears that grow in the first year or two will be quite thin and wispy. Don't harvest these but leave them on the plant over summer so they can absorb energy from the sun (photosynthesise) and develop the root system further. Once the spears are about the width of your index finger you can start harvesting them. Using a sharp knife push it into the soil and cut the spears off about 2 cm below ground level. The spears should continue growing for a 6-8 week period.

If you would like to try growing white asparagus, very sweet and tender - it is actually the same plant as green asparagus, only restricted from the sun, so it needs to be completely covered with mulch or plastic as soon as the spears start emerging.

The best way to store asparagus is to stand the freshly picked spears upright in a glass that have about 1cm of water in the bottom. Otherwise they can be wrapped in a clean damp tea towel and stored in a plastic bag in the vegie drawer of the fridge.