

Asparagus: A Very Fast Food

"Velocius . . . quam asperagi conquantur
– Augustus Caesar

When Augustus said "Quicker than you can cook asparagus," he was referring to the very few minutes of steaming fresh asparagus requires before it's ready to receive a blanket of garlic and butter.

The succulent spears were held in such high regard by the Romans, that in the first century A.D. fast chariots and runners were employed to rush fresh asparagus to the Alpine snowline, where it was kept chilled for 6 months until the Feast of Epicurus.

'Sparrow grass,' 'sparragrass' or just plain 'grass,' as it is referred to by commercial producers is not only speedy to prepare, but, under the proper conditions, the shoots can shoot up 10 inches in one day.



AGGRAND HORTFACT

Asparagus (*asparagus officianalis*) has been wild harvested in the Mediterranean region and Asia Minor for more than 2000 years. It is a member of the lily family (*liliacea*), which includes the lily, gladiolus, hosta and tulip.

The name is derived from the Greek *asparagos*, meaning 'sprout' or 'shoot.' The Romans brought it into cultivation around 200 B.C. Its popularity grew throughout Europe, appearing in England by perhaps 1000 A.D., where it was called 'sperage' or 'sperach' until the Latin name was adopted sometime in the 16th century.

Around the same time, asparagus was being touted as an aphrodisiac in certain Arabic texts, and was famously used by Mme. Pompadour in 18th century France to enhance, well, her delight. It finally arrived in America with early settlers, but was not formally cultivated here until sometime around 1850.

"Asparagus seems to inspire gentle thought."
– Charles Lamb, 18th C. English essayist

AGGRAND Liquids Prepare Soil, Nourish Roots For Healthy Asparagus Plants

- Allow a sunny space for the asparagus row that won't shade other plants when the unharvested shoots grow into 5-foot to 6-foot feathery shrublets. Alternatively, the asparagus can be planted to provide summer shade for greens or cooler-weather crops. (Asparagus thickets were said to have concealed Perigyne, beloved of Theseus.)
- Dig a furrow about a foot deep and wide, and as long as space allows. Create a mound down the center of the trench using a mixture of compost, composted manure or leaf mold mixed about half and half with garden soil. Apply AGGRAND Natural Liquid Bonemeal mixed 6 ounces per gallon of water down the entire row. Use about a gallon of solution per 10 feet of row.

- Soak the roots in a weak solution of AGGRAND 4-3-3 – 1 ounce of AGGRAND 4-3-3 in a gallon of water – for 15 minutes before planting. Then, spread the asparagus root crowns out over the mound in the trench 18 to 24 inches apart, making a slight mound beneath each crown.
- Once the crowns are in place, cover them gently with 2 to 3 inches of compost and water in thoroughly with more of the weak 4-3-3 solution. As the shoots begin to appear, spread the remaining soil compost mixture around them until only the top one inch is showing. Repeat this process every week until the soil is used up.
- At this point, water thoroughly with 3 ounces to one gallon 4-3-3 and 4 ounces to one gallon of 0-12-0 Bonemeal once per month during the growing season. Mulch with compost or shredded leaves to retain moisture. Be patient. While it takes only a few minutes to cook asparagus, it takes time for the plant to mature for harvest. Do not harvest any spears during the first growing season, and for only two weeks the next. By the third season, you should be able to harvest a full four-to-six weeks or more.