Harvest of the Month | Family Newsletter

Asparagus



While most people think of asparagus as a green vegetable, white and purple asparagus is also available. White asparagus is not a variety, but is asparagus grown in the absence of sunlight. It is slightly sweeter and has less fiber than green asparagus. Purple asparagus is bred to be purple, but turns green when cooked. While Europeans value white asparagus, Americans tend to prefer green asparagus.

Did you know?

- Asparagus is a member of the lily family, closely related to onions and leeks although different in appearance and flavor.
- Asparagus cultivation began more than 2,500 years ago by the ancient Greeks and Romans. The U.S. is the world's largest producer of broccoli.
- Asparagus requires about three years from planting to produce spears, but lasts for about 15 to 20 years.
- Some people are able to detect a change in the smell of their urine after eating asparagus.

Selection

Look for asparagus that has tender green stalks that are uniform in color with compact, firmly closed tips. Stalks vary in thickness, which is not an indication of quality. Contrary to popular belief, thin stems are not necessarily more tender than thicker stems. Avoid asparagus with wilted tips, wrinkled stalks, and stalks that have deep splits or cracks in the cut end.

Storage

To maintain freshness, stand upright in 2 inches of cold water and cover with a plastic bag. Store in the refrigerator. For best quality, use within 2 or 3 days.

Handling

Trim stem ends of fresh asparagus about ¼ inch. Wash in cold water several times and pat dry.

Nutrition

Asparagus is a good source of vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin K, and folate. Vitamin A helps maintain good vision and fight infection. Vitamin C is important in the body's healing process and may play a role in guarding against heart disease and cancer. Vitamin C also helps the body absorb iron. Vitamin K is important in the blood clotting process and therefore helps us avoid bleeding too much from cuts and scrapes. Folate is needed to produce healthy red blood cells.

Harvest Season

According to the PA Preferred Seasonality Calendar, asparagus is in season in Pennsylvania from April through June. May through November.

Preparation

Asparagus can be eaten raw. It can also be added to dishes such as pasta, casseroles, soups, or omelets. Cooking methods include steaming, roasting, grilling, and sautéing.

Recipe | Spring Vegetable Sauté

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients	Measure	Directions
Olive oil	1 teaspoon	1. Heat the oil in a skillet. Cook the onion 2 minutes, add the garlic and cook another minute.
Sweet onion (sliced)	½ cup	2. Stir in the potatoes and carrots. Cover, turn the heat to low, and cook until almost tender, about 4 minutes.
Garlic (finely chopped)	1 clove	3. If the vegetables start to brown, add a tablespoon or 2 of water.
New potatoes (tiny, quartered)	3	4. Now add the asparagus, peas, radishes, salt, pepper, and dill. Cook, stirring often, until just tender – about 4 minutes more.
Carrot (sliced)	¾ cup	5. Serve immediately.
Asparagus pieces	¾ cup	
Sugar snap peas, or green beans	¾ cup	
Radishes (quartered)	½ cup	
Salt	¼ teaspoon	
Black pepper	¼ teaspoon	
Dill	½ teaspoon	

Source: National Cancer Institute (NCI)



Check out the PA Harvest of the Month website (www.paharvestofthemonth.org) for sources, additional resources, and recipes.

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