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Asparagus Planting & Care

Allow 20 feet of row for every 10 plants, with rows spaced 4-5 feet apart. Asparagus can be grown in any well-drained, fertile soil, and slightly acidic but not below pH 6. As soon as the ground can be worked, dig a trench 18" wide and 10" deep. Add about 1½ pounds of 5-10-5 fertilizer per 20 foot row along with a liberal quantity of organic matter and compost and mix into the soil you have removed.

Fill the trench with this mixture to about 6" below ground level. Tamp it down and place the roots on top, crown side up, 2 feet apart. Cover with 2-3 inches of soil. As the plants sprout, add more soil until the trench is full.

To increase the growth rate, feed them with a 5-10-5 fertilizer two to three months after planting. Each spring and fall fertilize again. Watch for weeds and hoe them out shallowly to avoid injuring the underground stems. Mulching around the plants will help keep weeds down and moisture in. In fall, when the leaves have been killed by frost, cut off the top growth to ground level and mulch the bed again.

Over the first 2 years an extensive root system will grow to feed and support the stalks. The 2nd spring after planting, you can pick a few shoots when they are about 7" high, but restrict the harvesting to a month at most. From the 3rd year after planting, cut all shoots except the very thin ones. Harvest shoots when they are 5-8 inches tall and buds are still tight. When buds begin to open, the spears are past their prime. Stop harvesting when new stalks start growing thinner. The harvest season lasts 6-8 weeks. Leave these stalks, they will grow into tall, fernlike branches that will help feed the roots.

Harvest by bending the stalks at ground level until they snap, leaving the white part of the stalk in the ground. If you cannot use them immediately, keep the stalks upright in water until cooking time. Asparagus retains its delicate flavor when frozen.