



GROWING ASPARAGUS IN CANBERRA

It's hard to beat fresh asparagus straight from your own garden. Asparagus is delicious, easy to grow, frost hardy and perfectly suited to the Canberra region's climate.

WHAT DO I NEED?

- A sunny place
- Good drainage - no wet feet
- Soil well prepared with lots of manure, organic matter and fertiliser - your asparagus is a hungry plant and it will be there for up to 20 years.
- Added lime or dolomite
- Good quality asparagus crowns to start with! About 6-10 plants for a family.

HOW DO I GROW ASPARAGUS?

- Prepare the planting bed in advance with lots of well rotted cow manure, compost and a complete plant food - we recommend *Healthy Earth* fertilisers. Aim for a light fluffy soil; or you can mound the soil if is too heavy and less well drained. Canberra soils will usually need a little garden lime or dolomite added too, and you might need *Healthy Earth* ClayBreaker to deal with heavy clay soils.
- Plant asparagus from winter to early spring. Make a trench with a rough base in the improved soil at least 20cms deep by 30cms wide, leaving a ridge in the middle. Spread the bare roots of the asparagus crowns across the ridge, so the top of the crown is about 4cms below the surface. Space crowns 30-40 cms apart.
- Backfill over the roots with half the soil. Water in with a Seasol and a liquid fertiliser solution to help them settle. Gradually use the rest of the soil to fill in the trench as the plant grows.
- Keep weed free and mulched with Pea straw, Lucerne or Sugar Cane mulch. Water regularly during the growing season and fertilise regularly with *Healthy Earth*.
- After harvesting (see below) is finished, summer is the time for leafy growth in order to build up the thick roots. In late autumn, cut down the yellowing ferny shoots for compost (but dispose of any berries).
- Generous annual fertiliser, manure and a little lime will keep things chugging along. Do this in winter, lightly forking it in without damaging the crowns.

HARVESTING YOUR ASPARAGUS

- Asparagus shoots appear from September. Every 2 or 3 days, cut them at ground level when they reach 15-20cms high. Choose ones that are 1cm or more thick, the rest can grow on to leaf to help build up the plant. The harvesting season normally lasts 8-10 weeks.
- In the first year, just let your asparagus grow and build up. Do **not** harvest any spears, just let the shoots grow strongly into ferny leaf. In the second year, harvest the first asparagus spears but then ensure the rest grow strongly into leaf to further build up the plant.
- The third year and onwards should see you hitting full production!

TIPS

Green asparagus is the usual kind, although a tastier purple kind is also available. To get white asparagus, the usual way is to mound the soil up 15-20cms over the crown so the new shoots stay pale. To harvest these you need to carefully use a sharp knife severing the spear under the soil near the crown.

The female plants produce red berries, which are poisonous to humans. They also germinate freely and can be a nuisance, so it is common to either destroy the berries or remove the female plants completely.