



Design for Everyday Living

asparagus in your garden

Asparagus is a delicacy that should be in more West Virginia gardens. It is one of our earliest spring vegetables. It is high in Vitamins A, B, and C and is well suited for freezing. Other big points in its favor are that it is easy to grow and a planting will last from 10 to 15 years.

The production of good asparagus is not difficult, provided you follow a few simple rules.

SOIL AND FERTILIZATION

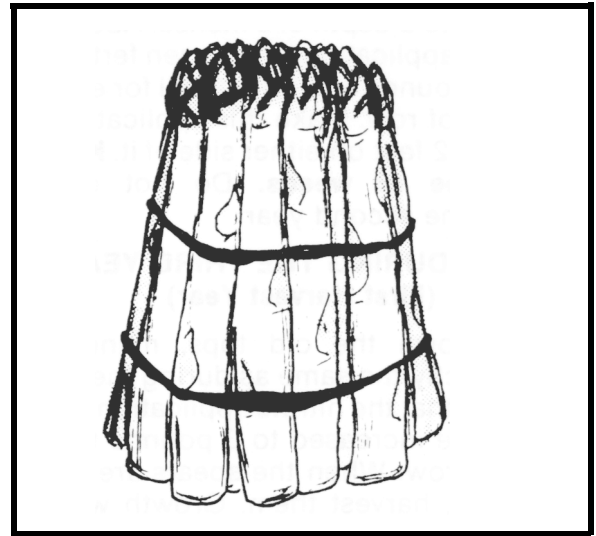
The ideal soil is a deep sandy loam. A sandy soil is not too good because its water and plant food holding capacity is low. If a sandy soil must be used, however, work into it large amounts of manure or compost. Heavy clays are not too good either, because they have a tendency to pack and they stay cold and wet later in the spring.

Because an asparagus planting will remain in the same location 10 to 15 years, everything possible should be done to increase the fertility of the soil before the crowns are set. During the late summer of the year before the crowns are to be set, make a heavy application of manure, if available, and 5 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer for each 100 square feet. Spade or plow the manure and fertilizer into the soil to a depth of 10 inches.

The soil should also be tested for lime requirements the year before the crowns are set. Asparagus prefers a pH of about 6.5, so be sure to apply enough lime to bring the soil reaction to this figure.

VARIETY

All male hybrids such as Jersey General or Jersey Giant will grow well in West Virginia.



AMOUNT TO PLANT

For an average family, a 100-foot row will be enough for a start. This will require about 70 plants.

PLANTING

It is best to obtain strong, well grown one-year-old plants. The roots of the two-year-old plants are often seriously mutilated when dug. In West Virginia the best time to plant asparagus is in the early spring when plants are still dormant. To set the plants, open a furrow about 8 inches deep and 10 inches wide. The soil should be fertile all the way to the bottom of the trench. If the fertile soil is not 8 inches deep, then a more shallow trench must be dug. Loosen the soil in the bottom of the trench and leave it a little higher in the center. Place the crowns in the trench about 12-18 inches apart, taking care to spread roots uniformly. If more than one row is planted, have rows 4-6 feet apart. Cover the crowns with 1 or 2 inches of soil and firm well around the roots. When growth begins, fill soil gradually around the shoots and by mid-summer the trench will be completely filled.

CARE DURING THE FIRST YEAR

After the asparagus has been set, the important thing is to keep the area free of weeds. Let the

stalks grow and stand over winter. They provide a mulch.

CARE DURING THE SECOND SEASON

During the first part of March, old dead stalks should be cut down. At about the same time apply a good coat of well-rotted manure or compost over as well as between the rows. Along with the manure apply 3 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer for each 100 square feet of area. The manure and fertilizer should be worked into the soil to a depth of 3 inches. About June 15 make an application of nitrogen fertilizer by applying 2 pounds of this material for each 100 square feet of row. Make this application over the row and 2 feet on either side of it. **Keep the planting free of weeds.** Do not cut any asparagus the second year.

CARE DURING THE THIRD YEAR (First Harvest Year)

Mow down the old tops, manure and fertilize exactly the same as during the second year except that the nitrate application on June 15 should be increased to 3 pounds for each 100 feet of row. When the spears are about 8 inches long, harvest them. Growth will soon become extremely rapid and harvesting will need to be done each day. Cut **all spears** for a period of about 4 weeks after which time allow them to grow. If at the end of the harvest period the soil has become packed, work it up again as in the spring. **Keep the planting free of weeds.**

CARE OF THE ESTABLISHED PLANTING

The established planting should be cared for just the same as for the third year except that the harvest season can be lengthened to 6-7 weeks, but never more than 8 weeks. Do not cut after July 4. If the harvest season is extended longer than this, the next year's crop will greatly decrease.

METHOD OF HARVESTING

The spears or shoots should be cut when they are about 8 inches tall. Use a sharp knife and cut about 1 inch below the surface of the

soil. Avoid needless jabbing of the knife into the soil because there will be other spears just ready to come through and this will injure them. Do not walk or step on the row during the harvesting process.

PESTS

Fortunately, there are few serious pests of asparagus in West Virginia. The most important of these are the two asparagus beetles. The **common asparagus beetle** is about ¼ inch long with bluish-black wing covers, on which are 6 squarish, yellow spots. The rest of the insect is reddish. The **spotted asparagus beetle** has orange or tan wing covers on which are 12 black spots.

Contact your local county extension office for current pest control recommendations.

N. Carl Hardin February 1984 1M

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