

NEWS RELEASE
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SPEAR TO FERN – GROWING ASPARAGUS

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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One year after planting, our asparagus is now in full fern. Next spring the first harvest of Mariposa-grown asparagus spears should make a tasty addition to dinner. Asparagus should be able to grow well in our county, at least up to 3,000 ft. elevation.

A few points to remember, according to the UC leaflet, *Growing Asparagus in the Garden*:

- Asparagus is a perennial vegetable.
- Soil that is well prepared at planting time will increase the yield of the plant through its years of production.
- Asparagus is usually planted by using roots (also called crowns) from 1-year-old plants or seedling transplants that are 8 to 10 weeks old. Planting from roots makes harvesting possible one year earlier than if plants are established from seed.
- The edible asparagus stalks are actually shoots that develop into fernlike leaves during summer. The plant continues to develop new shoots until the warm weather, when ferny growth develops from unharvested shoots. Irrigate and fertilize the plants during the fern season, when the plant is manufacturing food that will be stored by the roots for the next year's shoots.
- The ferns will turn brown in the fall, indicating that they have transferred their manufactured food to the roots. Cut back the ferns after they turn brown to allow the

plants to go through a period of winter dormancy. In the spring, new shoots will appear, starting the cycle again.

Suggested Planting Dates:

January through April.

Varieties:

Plant varieties with a high degree of tolerance to the *Fusarium* disease, such as UC 157 hybrid.

Soil Preparation and Fertilization:

Asparagus planted in properly prepared soil will produce in the home garden for as long as 15 years with minimal care.

Work the soil a foot or more deep, mixing in large amounts of manure, compost, peat moss, or similar organic material.

Mix 1 to 2 pounds of 5-10-10 or 5-10-5 fertilizer per 10 feet of row at the bottom of the trench or row (the numbers refer to the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, respectively, in the fertilizer). Cover the fertilizer with one or two inches of soil before placing the roots in the trench or row.

Planting:

Do not let roots dry out before planting. To plant, place the roots so that the tops are one or two inches below the surface of the well-prepared soil. In the fall, cover the roots with two more inches of soil. The following year, cover the surface with one or two more inches of soil. The roots will then be covered with five or six inches of soil. Ultimately, you will have a raised bed and may have to put boards along the rows or gently slope the soil to maintain plant coverage.

Asparagus roots spread widely, so plant them in rows four to six feet apart. If you have limited space, plant the roots in with other landscape plants. Asparagus is often used as a border plant next to the house.

Whatever planting method is used, irrigation, fertilization, and cut-back care remain the same.

Irrigation and Cultivation:

Asparagus should be irrigated mostly during the fern season, not the harvest season.

Asparagus should be well irrigated throughout the first year.

For a free copy of the U.C. leaflet, *Growing Asparagus in the Garden*, call our office in Mariposa at (209) 966-2417.

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