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Planting Asparagus

Are you looking to plant something in your garden that will give you food for the next 30 years? Then you should consider asparagus. Asparagus is a low maintenance crop that will come back year after year, ready for harvest each spring.

We happen to be in prime asparagus-planting season. Asparagus should ideally be planted between the second week of March through the first week of April. The easiest way to plant asparagus is buying 1 year old root crowns from a nursery or garden store. You can start asparagus by seed, but it takes a year for an asparagus seedling to produce a root crown that can be transplanted into your garden.

It is important to choose a space that you are willing to dedicate to asparagus for the next 30 years, as these plants will establish and keep coming back. The ideal site should get at least 8 hours of sun each day, and have well drained, fertile soil. If your site has poor soil, you can incorporate compost or manure into the soil before planting. A soil test will help you determine if fertilizer or pH adjustments are needed.

To plant asparagus crowns, dig a trench around 9 inches deep and 10 inches wide. Place the crowns in the trenches, spacing each crown 18 to 24 inches apart. Rows need spaced at least 4 feet apart. Rather than immediately burrowing the crowns, cover them with 2 inches of soil and pat the soil down. Over the summer, as the plant grows, you can gradually add more soil and fill in the trench.

Overall asparagus beds need little maintenance. The biggest task is preventing weeds that will try to outcompete young asparagus plants. Later in the summer, asparagus gets big and starts shading out weeds on its own. You can expect asparagus to get 4 to 6 feet tall. You may need to add posts into the asparagus patch to keep them from falling over. As the season progresses, they will also get bushy and start to produce seeds. At the end of the season, some gardeners remove the plant debris, but you can leave them to provide shelter for birds and critters during the winter, or to act as a wind break.

During the first year, asparagus needs to focus on sending food reserves to its roots. This means you should not try to harvest asparagus in the first year so it can focus on establishing. The following spring, asparagus will start to poke up from the ground. You can harvest some, but limit your harvest to 3 to 4 weeks. The following year you can begin harvesting for the full 6 to 8 weeks in the spring.

You can expect harvest to start around mid-April. When the shoots start to come out of the ground, cut them off with a knife at surface level or just below the surface. More spears of asparagus will then start to pop up from the ground. You can expect to harvest about every three days. During periods of warm temperature, you may be harvesting every day. If you do not harvest when the asparagus starts to emerge, they will get tall and start to branch out. At this point, it is best to leave them alone for the season.

If you have any questions about starting asparagus or how to care for your asparagus patch, reach out to your local extension office for more information!