

# ASPARAGUS



**ASPARAGUS** belongs to the lily family, along with onions, garlic, and chives. Asparagus has an enjoyably unique flavor and a meaty texture. It is available in the Northeast between mid-February and June in green or white. White asparagus is cultivated underground to prevent chlorophyll production. The size of the stalk indicates the number of years the plant has been growing. A thicker stalk means a more mature plant.

## STORAGE

- ◆ Asparagus will stay for a few days stored unwashed wrapped in **a damp paper or cloth towel** in the refrigerator drawer, or stored upright in a **glass of water** in the refrigerator.
- ◆ The stalks will keep this way for over a week.
- ◆ To **freeze** asparagus, remove tough ends and wash thoroughly, cut in 2 inch pieces, and steam for about 6 minutes. Drain and cool in ice water. Drain and pack in container, alternating tips and stem ends of spears.

## PREPARATION

- ◆ **Asparagus** can be **eaten raw** but is usually **cooked**.
- ◆ Steam, boil, or stir-fry asparagus then serve hot or cold in a favorite dish.
- ◆ Wash asparagus and trim/peel away tough ends. Cook whole or cut into smaller pieces.
- ◆ To boil, place stalks and tips uncovered in a small amount of boiling water for about 5 minutes.
- ◆ The green color of asparagus will brighten as it cooks. Remove from heat before the bright green color becomes dull.

### **Nutritional Information**

Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamins C, K and folate and a good source of vitamins A, E and potassium. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption. Vitamin K is important in blood clotting. A healthy diet with enough folate may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with certain birth defects of the brain or spinal chord. Vitamin A is important in vision, growth and development, skin health, immune function and reproduction. Vitamin E is an antioxidant that helps to protect cells from damage. This protection may lead to

# Asparagus Recipes

## Asparagus and Sun-dried Tomato Pasta (Serves 4)

16 ounces dry pasta  
1 bunch asparagus, cut into 1 inch pieces  
1/2 cup olive oil  
2-3 cloves garlic, minced  
2-3 scallions, sliced thinly  
1/2 cup sun-dried tomatoes, soaked  
1 pinch red pepper flakes  
Salt and pepper, to taste



Bring large pot of water to a boil and add dry pasta. Turn down heat and simmer until pasta is tender, about 10 minutes. While pasta is cooking, steam asparagus until barely tender. In a large skillet, heat oil. Add garlic and scallions and cook 2-3 minutes. Add asparagus, tomatoes and red pepper flakes and continue cooking 1-2 minutes more. Combine with cooked pasta, sprinkle with salt and pepper and enjoy.

Recipe contributed by Elizabeth Solomon, Just Food dietetic intern, 2003.

## Asian Asparagus Salad

1 1/2 lbs asparagus  
Marinade:  
2 Tablespoons tamari sauce  
1 1/2 teaspoons sugar  
1 Tablespoon dark sesame oil  
1 Tablespoon white vinegar  
1 Tablespoon Chinese rice wine or dry sherry  
1/2 teaspoon grated fresh ginger root  
1/2 teaspoon Chinese chili paste  
Lightly toasted sesame seeds for garnish



Rinse asparagus under running water. In large bowl combine water and ice, set aside. In a large pot, bring salted water to a boil. Add the asparagus, cook 1 or 2 minutes until tender crisp. Using tongs or slotted spoon, immediately remove asparagus and submerge in ice water. Stir until asparagus is cold, drain well. In bowl large enough to hold asparagus, whisk together marinade ingredients. Add asparagus and toss to coat. Cover and chill at least 30 minutes. Garnish with sesame seeds.

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## Roasted Asparagus (Serves 4)

1 bunch asparagus  
1-2 Tablespoons olive oil  
Salt and pepper, to taste  
Juice from one lemon



Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Wash and dry asparagus. On a cookie sheet or shallow roasting pan, place asparagus in a single layer. Sprinkle with olive oil, salt and pepper. Roast in the oven until asparagus is soft, about 15 minutes. Squeeze lemon juice over asparagus and serve immediately.

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