

How to Grow Asparagus

Asparagus is a perennial vegetable and once established can have a productive life of up to 15 years. The edible Asparagus spears are the young shoots which are produced in Spring. When harvesting for the season is finished, the shoots are allowed to grow to provide food for the underground root system (the crown). The shoots grow into attractive fern-like fronds which can reach heights of 1.5-2m under good conditions. In the winter the shoots die down and are cut at ground level. Growth recommences in late winter-spring when the spears emerge. Asparagus is frost tolerant and is quite easy to grow. It does well in the Perth metropolitan area and the South West.

Planting: The prime requirement of Asparagus cultivation is well drained soil and it is best grown in a full sun position. It is a long term crop which will be in the same spot for years, so choose your site carefully.

When Planting Potted Asparagus Plants: Potted plants can be planted year round. Improve the planting bed by blending in plenty of Dawson's Soil Improver to at least a spades depth. Add a sprinkle of Dawson's All Purpose Fertiliser or Eco Prime Garden. Potted Asparagus plants are usually seedlings and once planted should be left to grow for 2-3 years before you commence harvesting.

When Planting Crowns: Asparagus crowns are usually only available in July-August and should be planted as soon as possible after purchase. Dig a trench 30-40cm deep and 30cm wide, then lay a 10-15cm layer of Dawson's soil Improver and Cover this layer with a 5-10cm layer of improved soil. Then make a mound of soil along the centre of the trench. Crowns are planted top of the mound with roots spread out either side (the crowns should be placed so that they are about 10cm below the surface soil). Cover the crowns with about 5cm of soil, then gradually fill to soil level as the plant grows.

Care: Asparagus should be fertilised with Dawson's All Purpose fertiliser in Spring prior to the spears emerging and again when you have stopped harvesting spears. Asparagus requires a regular water supply and in Perth watering will be required from Spring until April-May. The idea being to try to maintain some soil moisture at all times while the fern is actively growing. To this end the application of a good quality, straw type surface mulch will greatly assist. In winter the shoots(fern) will start to yellow and die off, so cut the old shoots off at ground level.

Harvesting: Spears can be harvested when they have grown about 15-25cm above ground level, they should be cut with a sharp knife just below ground level. No spears are cut during the first season of growth, this allows the crown to establish itself. In next spring (one year from planting) harvesting should be restricted to the thickest spears only. In later years you can cut most of the spears that emerge. Remember once spear size begins to fall off it's best to allow the shoots to grow to provide food to fuel the crown for the next season. You need to harvest spears regularly several times a week or even daily as spears emerge very quickly and if left too long will start to fern out before you get to them. If you'd like to grow white Asparagus, you'll need to mound soil up over the rows in late winter to a height of about 30cm and then harvest the spears as soon as the tips break through the of the surface.

Varieties: Dawson's sell UC157. Developed by the University of California. Known for very high yields, UC157 is suitable to growth in warmer areas with mild winters. Smooth green spears, tight tipped, non stringy. The plant has tall feathery, graceful stems. It is the most commonly grown commercial variety world-wide.

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