

955 Benton Ave., Winslow, ME 04901 • Phone: 1-877-564-6697 • Fax: 1-800-738-6314  
Email: service@johnnyseeds.com • Web Site: Johnnyseeds.com

## **ASPARAGUS (*Asparagus officinalis*)**

**You have received hardy, 1-year-old asparagus crowns. Open the box immediately upon receipt and plant the crowns as soon as possible. If you unable to plant them immediately, remove any elastics or ties and gently loosen the crowns, cover them with damp sphagnum moss or newspaper, and store them in a cool location out of direct sunlight (such as a refrigerator). Do not expose the crowns to the drying sun or wind.**

Asparagus is a long-lived perennial plant that has been cultivated for thousands of years. The young spears, before they turn woody, are the only portions of asparagus that are edible. Any small, red berries that develop on the foliage later in the season should be avoided, as they are poisonous to humans. A properly selected and planted site will produce for 15 years or more.

### **SITE AND SOIL PREPARATION**

Establishment practices are very important for successful production. Errors made at planting are not easily corrected after planting and can reduce yields.

A soil test to indicate pH and nutrient levels should be taken the fall prior to planting. Asparagus prefers a sunny location free of perennial weeds, and will not survive in poorly drained soils or fields with standing water. Sandy loam soils are preferable for commercial production. In early spring prior to planting, apply compost, aged manure, or complete fertilizer, and work well into the soil to a depth of 12". Asparagus will not perform well in acidic soils. Add lime if necessary to raise the soil pH to 7.0.

### **PLANTING**

Crowns can be planted out 3–4 weeks prior to the average last frost date.

Depth of planting is critical: if planted too shallow, asparagus will produce a large number of small spears; and if planted too deep, the spears will be large but few in number.

Place asparagus crowns in a furrow 5–8" deep and 12" wide. Shallower planting may be beneficial in heavier soils to prevent the crowns from becoming waterlogged, while a deeper planting can be made in sandy soils.

With the buds upright and the roots splayed apart as best as you can, space crowns 8–14" apart in the row, with 3–6' between rows. Certain varieties have other spacing requirements, so be sure to reference the specific variety descriptions provided in our catalog or on our website.

Cover crowns with 2–3" of soil at planting, and water until the soil in the bed is evenly damp.



Crowns laid out in the planting trench, ready to be covered with an initial layer of soil.

As the shoots appear above the soil, gradually back-fill the furrow, ensuring that the tips of the shoots are not completely covered. Progressively fill the trench every couple of weeks by back-filling 3–4 times during the first year (see photo below).

Asparagus beds require consistent soil moisture during their first season after planting. Water stress can delay establishment or result in crown death.



Back-filling the planting trench.

## PERENNIAL MAINTENANCE

Be sure to keep the asparagus bed weed-free. A mulch of hay, straw, or leaves should be applied after the planting trench has been completely back-filled to regulate moisture and suppress weeds. Shallow tillage (½–1" deep) in early spring or after harvest will help to control any overwintering weeds.

Be sure to use caution when cultivating, as damage to the crowns can provide an entry point to soilborne disease.

Asparagus is a heavy feeder and should be fertilized regularly to maintain productivity. Each fall or early spring after establishment, add compost or aged manure to the beds.

Soil testing is recommended every 2–3 years to monitor the pH so it can be maintained at 7.0.

## PEST MANAGEMENT

Most insect pests can be controlled with good sanitation and cultural practices. Asparagus beetles overwinter in crop debris within the bed and surrounding areas. Removal of this debris will help to reduce populations. Wait until the foliage senesces (naturally deteriorates) in the fall prior to trimming it to ground level.

Scout for insect pests regularly. If populations increase to damaging levels, pyrethrin or spinosad can be used to control asparagus beetles, aphids, and cutworms.

## HARVEST

A year after planting, you can harvest from your asparagus bed for a 7–10 day period in the spring. Two years after planting the bed, you can harvest for 2–3 weeks. In the third and subsequent years, a harvest duration of 6 weeks is normally possible under favorable conditions.

Spears are considered marketable when they reach 7" in length with a pencil-size diameter. Harvest by bending the tender shoots over until they snap, or cut with a knife at or just below soil level. If using a harvest knife, do so with care to avoid damaging developing spears that are just below the soil surface. Harvest all spears, including damaged, thin, and spindly ones. (Allowing cull spears to fern out during harvest will delay spear production, and offer insect pests host sites to build up populations.)

Store at 36°F (2.2°C) and 95–100% relative humidity for up to 2 weeks.