



PLANTING ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is a perennial plant, purchased as "crowns," that can grow to a height of 5 feet or more and produce spears for many years. It is grown for its edible spears, but asparagus foliage also is beautiful in the garden. This vegetable requires patience, as the asparagus spears should not be harvested until the third year after planting.

Plant asparagus in a permanent garden space where it will not shade other vegetables. To prepare a bed for asparagus crowns, till a row that allows about 2 to 3 square feet per crown, at 8 to 10 inches deep. A raised bed works well for asparagus as it ensures adequate drainage. Spread 3 to 6 inches of our *cotton burr compost* over the row, and add our *organic chicken manure* at the rate of 1/2 inch thickness applied to the growing area. Add a complete fertilizer such as our synthetic 12-24-12, or our organic 4-3-2 fertilizer. *Greensand* also should be applied to create strong and healthy plants. Mix all of these ingredients thoroughly into the soil, and your bed is ready for planting.

Mound the soil for the crowns, arranging the crown in the mounded space with the roots spread in an outward direction. Immediately cover the crowns with 2 inches of soil to prevent them from drying out. If you plant two rows, stagger the crowns so that they are not directly across from each other in the rows. After placing 2 inches of soil over the crowns, water well. In several weeks, the first young spears will appear. As they grow, you should place additional compost to the garden surface, being careful not to cover the asparagus foliage. Mulch around the plants with compost and keep weeds away from the plants.

CARE AND CULTIVATION OF ASPARAGUS

During the first two growing seasons, keep asparagus watered, fertilized, and weeded, and remove the dead tops in the winter, but do not harvest the spears. In year 3 after planting, begin harvesting spears when they are 6 inches tall. With a sharp knife, cut diagonally through the spear just below ground level in order to prevent woody "stumps" above ground. To encourage strengthening of the root storage system, the first harvest season should last only about four weeks. Thereafter, harvest can be extended to up to eight weeks. A large proportion of the spears will emerge during the first half of the harvest season, and production will taper off as the season progresses. Harvesting should cease when the spears are less than 3/8 inch in diameter. One mature asparagus plant will yield an average of 8 to 12 spears per year.