

# ASPARAGUS

## ANSWERS AT A GLANCE

- **Spacing:** 12"–14" between plants, 3' between rows unless otherwise specified. Closer spacing is recommended for Purple Passion (6"–8"). Furrows should be 8"–10" deep, 8" is recommended for heavier, clay-like soils.
- **pH requirements:** **VERY IMPORTANT.** Asparagus must have a soil pH of 7.0 – 7.2. Addition of lime may be necessary to adjust pH. Use soil tests to check and maintain soil pH, and phosphorous levels.
- **Irrigation:** Plants need a well-drained site. Lighter soils may require more frequent watering than heavier soils, which retain moisture better. Maintaining moisture during establishment year is important.
- **Fertilization:** Prior to planting, incorporate 5 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. in the early spring. In establishment year, side dress in August with 1 lb. 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. and work into top 2" of soil. In succeeding years, use 2 lbs. 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. in early spring, and again following harvest. Use of lime, bone meal, and super phosphate helps maintain proper soil levels. Do not add compost until plants are growing.
- **Weed Control & Mulching:** Ferns will die back naturally in the fall. In the spring mulching the dried ferns with a mower will reduce weed pressure. Check with local extension before using chemical products.



## PLANTING

Choose a permanent, sunny location with well-drained soil. It is best if you prepare the site a year in advance by removing all perennial weeds and applying lime if needed to adjust the pH. A soil test should be done to check that the soil is in the correct pH range and that it contains high levels of phosphorous. *Make any soil pH adjustments before you plant.*

We recommend bone meal or super phosphate and lime incorporated thoroughly at the bottom of the planting furrow. Lay crowns along the bottom of the furrow and cover with 2-4 inches of soil. Do not add compost until plants are growing (Stage 3).

As the spears grow up through the soil, above ground level, and expand into fern, gradually fill the trench, using up to 50% compost with soil. Using this method helps to keep down small weeds. Within six weeks, the furrow should be completely filled. (see illustration)

## FERTILIZING

In the establishment year, in addition to the spring fertilizer application, side dress in early August with 1 pound of 10-10-10 (or equivalent) per 100 square feet and lightly work into the top inch or two of soil.

## **BED MAINTENANCE**

In the early spring of the 2nd year, cut the old ferns down to ground level. Control weeds all season and irrigate as needed. Be on the lookout for asparagus beetles. These insects can cause considerable damage to an established bed. Aphids and the asparagus miner are also pests to check for. For chemical weed and pest control recommendations, contact your local Cooperative Extension office.

In early spring of each succeeding year, follow the same routine except increase the fertilizer to 2 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet. Side dress again after harvest with 2 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. Test your soil pH every 3-4 years to maintain a pH of 7.0-7.2. Broadcast lime according to the soil test results and recommendations.

## **HARVESTING SPEARS**

Research shows that you can begin to harvest asparagus the year after establishment, cutting all the first spears that appear for a period of 7-10 days. (Once spears begin to get spindly, stop harvesting.) The second season is similar, except that you can harvest all the spears that appear for a period of 4 weeks. By the third year, you can cut for the full season, which is usually about 8 weeks long.

**TIP:** During harvest Asparagus roots need 2"-3" of water per week and before too dry. If frosted tips become brown, remove immediately to prevent further set back of planting.

Be careful not to damage emerging spears when cutting below the soil surface. An alternative to cutting is to snap the spears. Make sure you snap stalks off close to the soil surface so as not to leave stubs of asparagus. Stubs can be potential entry points for pests and diseases. Always maintain good growing conditions after harvest, keeping the planting weed and insect free. Do not remove any ferns. They will die back naturally in the fall with freezing temperatures. Use the dried ferns in early spring as a mulch to reduce weed pressure. With a little care you should enjoy an asparagus bed for many years.

## **PLANTING CROWNS**

- 1. Set crowns upright in wide furrows, six to eight inches deep, with roots spread.**
- 2. Cover with two inches of soil. Do not add compost!**
- 3. and 4. gradually fill the furrows adding up to 50% compost to soil as the plants grow.**

