



Asparagus Facts & Recipes

Asparagus is one of San Joaquin County’s leading crops with over 23,000 acres grown in the county. This represents a 57 million dollar industry including both the growing and the processing of the crop. Asparagus is a native of Europe having been cultivated for over 2,000 years. The early Greeks and Romans considered it a delicacy.

Asparagus is a perennial crop. Harvest is normally started the third year after planting. The usual commercial life of an asparagus field is from 10 to 12 years. Asparagus is harvested in San Joaquin County from the first of March to the middle of June. It is cut for the fresh market during March and April. Asparagus for the cannery and freezer is cut from the middle of April to the middle of June.

Green asparagus is cut for canning. Green asparagus shoots are cut above ground to give a spear with approximately 8 inches of green and a 1-inch white butt to facilitate long-term shipping. The University of California developed most of the asparagus varieties now grown in California. The primary variety now in production is a hybrid (UC-157), and average production is normally about 3500 pounds per acre.

Nutrition. It averages 4 calories per spear. Contains a large amount of Vitamin A and some Vitamin C. Contains minerals, calcium, and iron.

Buying Tips. It should be fresh, firm with close compact tips. Wilting and a spreading tip indicate that considerable time has elapsed since the stalk was cut. The color should be deep green or bluish-green with a minimum of white stems. One pound serves 2-4 people.

Storing. Keep cool and moist in the refrigerator and plan to serve soon after purchase.

How to Cook Fresh Asparagus. Break off asparagus as far down as it snaps easily. Wash thoroughly. Remove any loose scales. Cook stalks by standing on stem end in ½-inch of boiling water. If the serving is tied into a bundle, it will be easier to handle. Cook uncovered first 3 minutes. Then cover and cook to crisp-tender stage. Remove with tongs. Season as desired.

To Freeze. Sort according to size and thickness of stalks. Wash thoroughly. Break off and discard tough parts of stalks. Blanch in boiling water: small stalks for 2 minutes; medium stalks for 3 minutes; and large stalks for 4 minutes. Cool at once in ice water or in cold running water. Drain. Pack, seal, and freeze.

Cooking Frozen Asparagus. Add frozen asparagus to boiling water. Cover and cook 7-10 minutes or until crisp and tender. Season as desired.

To Open Canned Asparagus. Open the bottom of the can to prevent damaging the tips.

Seasonings. Use any one of the following in small amounts until you determine family preference.

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| almond | caraway seed | curry |
| dry mustard | garlic | lemon |
| nutmeg | onion | sour cream |
| tarragon | | |

Herb Butter. Soak ½ teaspoon dry herb (tarragon, thyme, basil or rosemary) in 1 tablespoon boiling water. Allow to stand a few minutes. Blend into 4 tablespoons butter.

Easy Chicken Divan

- 1 pkg. frozen asparagus pieces
- 6 slices cooked or canned chicken or turkey
- 1 Tbsp. melted butter or margarine
- 1 can undiluted condensed cream-of-chicken soup, heated
- ½ cup grated process American cheese

Cook asparagus as label directs. Arrange chicken in 12"x8"x2" baking dish; top with asparagus and butter. Then combine heated soup and cheese; pour over asparagus. Brown lightly under broiler. Makes 4 servings.

Asparagus Vinaigrette Salad

- 1 lb. fresh asparagus, cooked & chilled
- 1 cup bottled creamy French dressing
- 2 Tbsp. minced bell pepper
- 2 Tbsp. minced sweet pickles
- 1 Tbsp. snipped parsley
- 1 Tbsp. instant onion flakes
- salt & pepper to taste
- iceberg lettuce
- hard cooked egg or pimiento

Combine French dressing, green peppers, pickles, parsley, and onion flakes. On individual salad plates, arrange the asparagus over the iceberg lettuce. Spoon vinaigrette dressing over asparagus. Garnish with hard-cooked egg or pimiento.

Asparagus & Cheese Sauce

- 2 lbs. fresh asparagus
- 3 Tbsp. butter
- 4 ½ tsp. flour
- ¾ cup undiluted evaporated milk
- ¼ lb. process American cheese
- ½ tsp. salt
- ⅛ tsp. dry mustard
- ⅛ tsp. pepper

Prepare and cook asparagus. Meanwhile, prepare a cheese sauce from above ingredients. Place asparagus on a platter in serving groups. Serve cheese sauce in bowl permitting each person to add the amount he wishes to his serving.

Ginger Beef of Asparagus

- 1 lb. tender beef cut diagonally into ⅛ -inch strips
- ¼ cup peeled ginger root, sliced thinly and cut into strips
- ½ cup green onion, cut in 1-inch pieces
- 1 small whole onion, sliced
- ½ lb. asparagus, fresh (cut in 1-inch pieces)
OR canned asparagus
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 can mushroom gravy

Prepare beef, ginger, onion, and asparagus; set aside. Heat oil in wok or skillet until frying-hot. Sauté garlic until golden brown; add ginger, then onion. When onion has a clear color, add beef, salt, and soy sauce. Add just enough water to keep meat from sticking to pan. Cook, stirring once in a while. When meat is tender, add the mushroom gravy. When simmering, add green onions and asparagus; cook about 2 or 3 minutes more.

Pickled Asparagus

Brine

- 2 quarts white vinegar
- 2 quarts water
- 8 Tbsp. salt
- 2 Tbsp. whole pickling spices

Blanch asparagus 1 minute. Cool quickly in ice water. Pack jars with 1 clove garlic and asparagus. Pour boiling brine over asparagus. Seal. Process in simmering water bath for 15 minutes to ensure seal.

Variation: May add dill to jars along with garlic.

Source: California Asparagus Growers



Asparagus Sweet Pickles

- 2-4 lbs. asparagus
- 2 cups vinegar
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tsp. whole allspice
- 6 whole cloves
- 3 inches stick cinnamon

Wash asparagus. Trim to fit pint jars. Cover asparagus with boiling water; cook 3 minutes; drain. Pack length-wise into hot pint jars, leaving ½-inch headspace.

In a saucepan, combine vinegar, water and sugar. Tie allspice, cloves and cinnamon in a cheesecloth bag. Add spice bag to pickling liquid. Simmer 15 minutes. Cover asparagus with hot pickling liquid leaving ½-inch headspace.

Adjust lids. Process in boiling water bath 15 minutes to assure a crisp pickled product, keep the water in the canner at 180 degrees during the 15-minute processing time.

Makes 4 pints.

Yellow Crystals on Home Canned Pickled Asparagus

Question: Yellow crystals have formed on my home canned pickled asparagus. Is the asparagus safe to eat? What causes this? Why don't crystals form on commercially canned asparagus?

Answer: Yellow crystals on home canned pickled asparagus are called **rutin** and are safe to eat.

When asparagus is heated with acid (such as vinegar), rutin, which is bioflavonoid, is drawn out of the asparagus plant. It then becomes insoluble in the vinegar and crystallizes on the exterior of the asparagus stems. In commercially canned asparagus, a small amount of tin salts are added to the pickling solution, which prevents the rutin from crystallizing.

Garlic in Pickles Turn Blue

Question: I used fresh garlic in my pickles and it turned blue. Why?

Answer: Garlic contains a chemical that reacts with acid and if the chemical is present in large concentrations, the garlic will turn blue. Immature garlic contains more of this chemical. The color change is harmless.

Compiled by Anna Martin
Nutrition, Family, and Consumer Sciences Advisor
University of California Cooperative Extension of San Joaquin County
420 South Wilson Way, Stockton, California 95205-6243 Telephone (209) 468-2085

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