

# Asparagus

## Interesting Facts

European settlers brought asparagus to North America. “Asparagus” is a Greek word meaning “stalk” or “shoot”. It has been grown for over 2000 years for both food and medicinal purposes. In the past, people believed that eating asparagus before a meal would refresh and open the liver, spleen and kidneys. They also believed it to be good for the eyes. Asparagus was once thought to cure bee stings, toothaches, heart trouble and maintain good eyesight.

## What is asparagus?

Asparagus, a member of the lily family, is the young, green shoot or stem of the asparagus plant. It is one of the vegetables to appear earliest in the spring. After harvest season, shoots are grown into tall fern-like plants. Asparagus is a good source of vitamin A. It also supplies several of the B vitamins and vitamin C.

## Where is asparagus produced in BC?

Asparagus is grown in the Lower Mainland, in the Okanagan Valley, on Vancouver Island and near Creston.

## How much asparagus do we produce?

BC produces about 134,000 kilograms, which is retailed through farm and roadside sales. BC produces 2% of the Canadian total. Asparagus production in BC has declined in recent years, but there is room for more production for local fresh sales.

## How is asparagus produced?

Asparagus plants are dioecious, which means male and female reproductive parts are on different plants. Asparagus seeds are planted in late spring. It is important that the seeded area be free of perennial weeds. The asparagus will establish a crown and a root base from which the asparagus shoots will grow. In the second year, growers set out 1-year-old asparagus crowns in a 20-25cm deep furrow and cover them with 4cm of soil. The third year is the establishment year for asparagus. There are few stems produced and the asparagus crown grows to mature size. Once asparagus plants are mature, shoots are harvested for 6 to 8 weeks in the

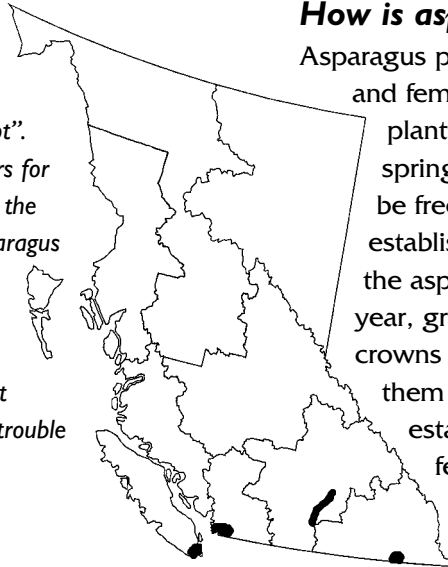
spring. The stems are cut off at the base of the plant. After harvest, which is very labour intensive, the asparagus spears are permitted to grow into fern-like plants. This growth manufactures carbohydrates that are stored in the roots and used to produce new growth the following spring. Established fields are productive for 15 to 20 years.

## How is asparagus used?

Asparagus is sold to stores and restaurants as a fresh vegetable. It is also canned or frozen. Asparagus is a good source of potassium and an excellent source of folate.

## What happens after asparagus leaves the farm?

Asparagus needs to be cooled quickly to 0°C, or the tips will continue to grow. From the farm, it is shipped to sales outlets or to processing plants.



## What challenges do asparagus producers face?

Asparagus, like many other crops, needs fertile soil. Growers have their soil tested regularly to know exactly which nutrients must be added to ensure the best crop. Samples of soil are taken to a laboratory, where they are analyzed. The results will indicate the amounts of various nutrients in the soil. From this, the grower chooses what fertilizer will be required.

Asparagus growers also face the challenge of high input costs and low prices. They face strong competition from imported asparagus that is available year round as well as competition from other vegetables.

## Who's involved in producing asparagus?

- Asparagus growers
- Sales people
- Processors

## Contacts and other resources:

BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands  
BC Asparagus Growers' Association

### Nutritional Facts

Serving Size: 5 asparagus spears (93g)

Calories	25
Total Fat	0g
Saturated Fat	0g
Cholesterol	0mg
Sodium	0mg
Total Carbohydrate	4g
Dietary Fibre	2g
Sugars	2g
Protein	2g
Vitamin A	10%
Vitamin C	15%
Iron	2%
Calcium	2%
Calories from Fat	0
Daily Value*	
Total Fat	0%
Saturated Fat	0%
Cholesterol	0%
Sodium	0%
Total Carbohydrate	1%
Dietary Fibre	8%

\*Per cent Daily Values are based on a 2,000-calorie diet.

