

Growing Asparagus

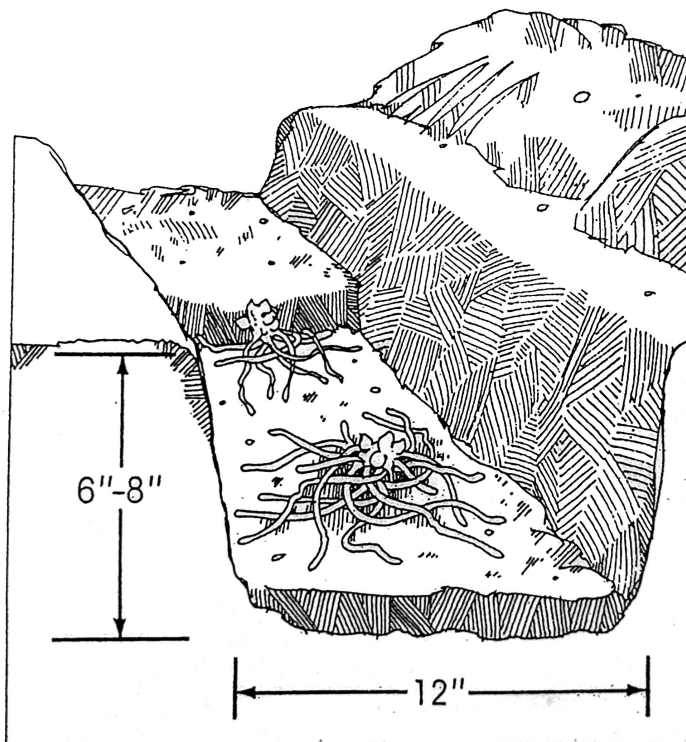
A Garden Guide

Asparagus is a long-lived plant - living for 15-20 years, possibly longer - so bed preparation is important. Choose a sunny, well-drained site that will not be disturbed. To improve drainage and fertility, enrich the soil with lots of compost, leaf mold, composted manure, or other excellent organic matter. For acidic soils, add lime. Asparagus grows best in extra rich soil with a soil pH near neutral - between 6.5 - 6.7.



Soak roots in water for 1-2 hours prior to planting. Dig 12" wide planting trenches to a depth of 6-8" deep and 4' apart. Set the crowns in the trench 1-2' apart with their tentacle-like roots draped over small mounds of soil or compost; top with 2" of soil. Continue adding soil every two weeks until soil is slightly mounded to allow for settling to ensure drainage away from the crowns.

Plan to fertilize the asparagus twice a year. In early winter, clip off yellowing fronds and remove, pull any weeds, and mulch the bed over with a 2" blanket of composted cow manure and straw. That is one of your fertilizations.



Harvest when spears are anywhere from 4-9" long, gathering them usually every other day. Stop harvesting after 6-8 weeks, except for 2-year old plants - harvest for only 3 weeks. Don't harvest any spears the first year.

When the harvest season ends, feed the patch again with a balanced, slow release fertilizer such as composted cow manure. Within a month, your bed will be a floating sea of fronds.

Asparagus is a dioecious plant - either female or male. Spears of both genders are equally tasty, with the female spears being more slender and producing seedlings. Male hybrids are plumper, produce 2-3

times as many spears, and generally live longer.



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