

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week

By David Fitch

“Asparagus”

When I was growing up my mother could not get me to eat green vegetables of any kind. I employed every trick in the book and even invented a few more in an effort to escape those nasty tasting vegetables. The U.S. Army changed all that. By the time I completed basic training at Fort Bragg, NC, I would eat anything on my plate and then ask for seconds.

As an adult I developed a taste and an appreciation for asparagus, *Asparagus officinalis*. There are as many as 300 species of asparagus but most are considered to be ornamental plants. People have been enjoying asparagus as a food item since the early days of the Roman and Greek empires. Asparagus was later brought to North America by the early European settlers. Historically, asparagus is considered to be a delicacy for the higher society. Even today, asparagus is one of the more pricy vegetables found at the super market. That may be explained by the fact that asparagus is one of the most difficult vegetables for the average gardener to establish and maintain in the garden.

Asparagus is a perennial plant. Therefore, it requires a dedicated spot in your garden. As an alternative, you can establish a separate planting area that is not part of your main vegetable garden. The spot you ultimately select should get full sun and be a light, well-drained soil. Asparagus prefers a soil rich in nutrients with a pH on the acid side of neutral, 6.5 to 7.5. The plants grow to 4 or 5 feet tall so be careful not to place them where they will shade your other plants. Starting asparagus from seed is a very risky, time consuming, and daunting task. It is highly recommended by experienced gardeners that you start by planting year old crowns. The crowns can be purchased from many reputable vendors of garden plants. Typically the crowns are planted in rows about 1 ½ feet apart and about 6 inches deep. Start by digging a trench. Place the crowns in the trench and put in just enough soil to cover them. As they grow, continue to cover with soil until the trench is filled.

I prefer to cook mine on a griddle or a large frying pan with a little bit of virgin olive oil. If you add some Italian bread crumbs, some garlic, onions and seasoning of choice and you have a great addition to any meal. Be careful not to overcook them. They are best when still a little crunchy but tender. Give it a try. You'll get the hang of it.

Be patient! You will not be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor for at least a year after starting the crowns and possibly not until the year after that. So if you are thinking of planting asparagus, now would be a good time to start the process. For more detailed information on planting and maintaining your asparagus garden, check with the Aggie Horticulture web site.

Come to the MG Garden tour May 7th from 9AM to 4 PM. For information visit the master gardener web site: bell-tx.tamu.edu, or call the AgriLife Extension Office at [254-933-5305](tel:254-933-5305). Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas ask.bcmga@gmail.com