

Asparagus

Choosing, Storing, Preparing, and Enjoying

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Asparagus is nutritious and delicious. It is available fresh, frozen, and canned meeting budget, preference, and accessibility needs. Asparagus supports our health in many ways. Consider the points below when choosing, storing, and preparing your asparagus so you can enjoy it in a variety of ways all year-long.

Choosing Asparagus

When selecting asparagus, look for:

- Bright green stalks with tightly closed tips.
- The earliest, most tender stalks, which are apple green color with purple-tinged tips
- Generally 6 to 8 inches long
- Tough, woody base of asparagus stalks not much more than an inch in thickness
- Stalks with uniform thickness

Storing Asparagus

To extend the life of your asparagus, save food dollars, and enjoy the best flavor and texture, consider these storage tips:

- Store asparagus in the refrigerator and use within two weeks.
- Store spears upright with stems in water, or wrap cut ends in wet paper towel or cloth and store in a plastic bag.
- Asparagus can be preserved now and enjoyed later. Check out *Home Canning Basics* (FCS 3-578) to learn about canning. Asparagus can also be frozen. Check out *Home Freezing Basics* (FCS 3-334) and *Freezing Vegetables* (FCS 3-335) to read about freezing to preserve it.

Preparing Asparagus

Always wash asparagus under cool running water. To prepare asparagus for eating, either remove the outer layer of the tough asparagus stem with a vegetable peeler, trim off the tough ends of the asparagus, or break the stalk by hand where it snaps easily. Fresh asparagus can be enjoyed raw, steamed, or roasted. Asparagus also makes a savory addition to many dishes, such as salads, pasta salads, stir-fry dishes, and more.

Enjoying Asparagus

Asparagus is available fresh, which may require some preparation. It can be enjoyed raw and can add flavor and texture to salads. Asparagus is also available canned, pickled, and frozen. Canned and frozen asparagus provide the nutrients of fresh asparagus, but may be more convenient, accessible, and budget-friendly options for recipes. Choose “low sodium” or “no salt added” versions. Consider the added liquid in the cans when using in recipes. Frozen asparagus is convenient and often takes less time to cook than fresh. Follow the instructions on the package for preparation methods. Choose frozen asparagus without sauces or seasonings to add your own flavor and to reduce the amount of sodium in your diet.

Asparagus works together with other foods to support our health in a variety of ways

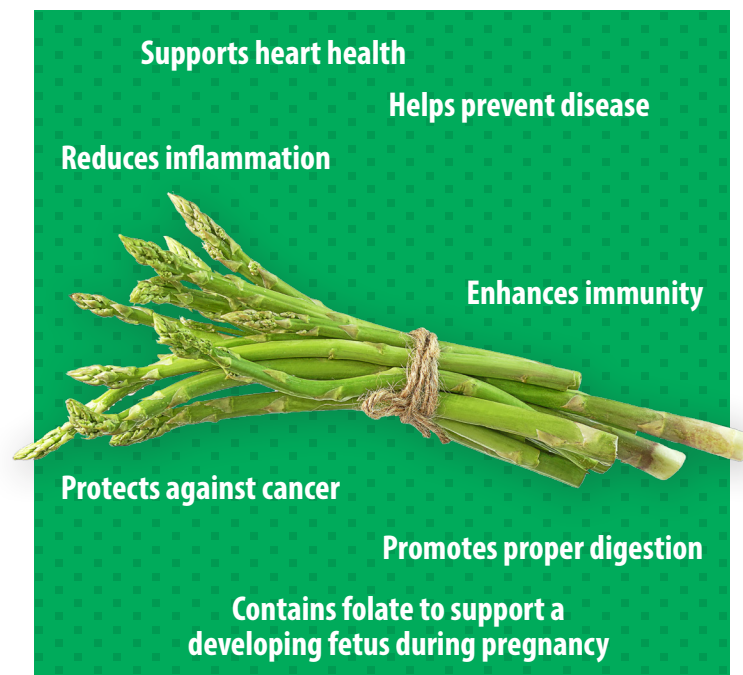


Table 1. Methods for cooking asparagus

| Method | Steps to Take |
|--------|--|
| Steam | Place asparagus on a rack above boiling water and steam for approximately 5 minutes. Asparagus stalks should be bright green and tender with a little crispness left. Simply season with salt and pepper and enjoy. |
| Roast | Place asparagus spears in a layer on a baking sheet. Drizzle with vegetable oil, season with salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Roast at 425°F for 15 to 20 minutes. |
| Sauté | Add a small amount of vegetable oil or butter to a skillet, frying pan, sauté pan, wok, or on a griddle over medium to medium-high heat. Once the pan is heated and the oil moves freely in the pan, add asparagus in a single layer. Toss the asparagus every so often to help cook evenly. Cook for 3-5 minutes or until tender. |

Recipes

Asparagus Tomato Salad

Yield: 6 servings

- 1 pound of fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 small zucchini, halved and cut into 1/4-inch slices
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1/4 teaspoon honey mustard
- 1 cup cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- 1/4 cup sliced green onions
- 1/4 cup shredded fresh mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley

Directions

- Place the asparagus and zucchini in a steamer basket. Place in a saucepan over 1 inch of boiling water. Cover and steam for 2 minutes. Rinse in cold water.
- In large bowl, whisk together olive oil, red wine vinegar, garlic, seasoned salt, and honey mustard. Pour over asparagus mixture; toss to coat. Toss in tomatoes and green onions. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese and parsley.

Per serving: 110 calories; 7 grams fat; 5 milligrams cholesterol; 35 milligrams sodium; 5 grams carbohydrate; 4 grams protein

Asparagus Ham Quiche

Yield: 16 slices

- 1 pound fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1/2 inch pieces
- 1 cup finely chopped ham
- 1 small finely chopped onion
- 2 (8 inch) unbaked pie shells
- 1 egg white, slightly beaten
- 2 cups shredded reduced fat cheddar cheese
- 4 large eggs
- 1 container (5.3 ounces) plain Greek yogurt
- 1/3 cup 1% milk
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

Directions

- Preheat oven to 400°F.
- Place asparagus in a steamer over 1 inch of boiling water and cover. Cook until tender but still firm, about 4-6 minutes. Drain and cool.
- Place ham and onion in a nonstick skillet and cook over medium heat until lightly browned. Brush pie shells with beaten egg white. Spoon the ham, onion, and asparagus into pie shells, dividing evenly between the two shells. Sprinkle 1 cup shredded cheese over the mixture in each shell.
- In a separate bowl, beat together eggs, yogurt, milk, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Pour egg mixture over the top of the cheese, dividing evenly between the shells. Bake uncovered in a preheated oven until firm 25-30 minutes. Allow to cool approximately 20 minutes before cutting.

Per serving: 200 calories; 11 grams fat; 65 milligrams cholesterol; 370 milligrams sodium; 14 grams carbohydrate; 10 grams protein

Asparagus Tomato Stir-fry

Yield: 4 servings

- 3/4-pound fresh asparagus
- 1/4 cup chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon light soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 4 green onions
- 2 Roma tomatoes
- 1½ cups fresh mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Directions

- Trim asparagus and cut into 1-inch pieces. Combine broth, soy sauce, ginger, garlic, pepper and cornstarch in a small bowl to make sauce. Chop green onions and tomatoes into 1/2-inch pieces. Slice mushrooms.
- Pour oil into a wok or large skillet and preheat over medium-high heat. Add asparagus and green onions; stir-fry 4 minutes. Add mushrooms; stir-fry 1 additional minute or until asparagus is tender-crisp. Push vegetables to the outer sides of the wok. Add sauce in center, cook until thick and bubbly. Add tomatoes. Stir well and heat through.

Per serving: 70 calories; 4 grams fat; 0 milligrams cholesterol; 210 milligrams sodium; 7 grams carbohydrate; 3 grams protein

No-fuss Oven Frittata

Yield: 6 servings

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 (8-ounce) package fresh sliced mushrooms
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and sliced into 1½-inch pieces
- 8 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese

Directions

- Gently scrub the onion and asparagus with a clean vegetable brush under cool running water before preparing them. Rinse the mushrooms under cool running water, being sure to remove any dirt; pat dry.
- Preheat oven to 350°F.
- Heat oil in a large ovenproof skillet. Add onion, mushrooms, and asparagus. Cook until tender (about 5 minutes). Remove from heat.
- Crack eggs into a bowl; add black pepper and salt. Whisk until mixture is uniform in color and texture. Pour eggs over vegetables in skillet. Sprinkle top with shredded cheese.
- Place skillet in preheated oven. Bake 10 to 15 minutes until eggs are firm and a thermometer inserted into the center reaches 160°F.
- Cut into six slices and serve warm. Store leftovers in the refrigerator within 2 hours.

Per serving: 190 calories; 13 grams fat; 265 milligrams cholesterol; 380 milligrams sodium; 6 grams carbohydrate; 14 grams protein

References

- Avizienis, A., Lawrence, K., & Cornish-Keefe, S. (2019). *The Fruit & Vegetable Bible*. Moseley Road Inc.
- Durham, R., Rudolph, R., Williams, M., Wright, S., Bessin, R., & Lee, B. (2024). *Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky*. Cooperative Extension Service. Available at: <https://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID128/ID128.pdf>.
- Duyff, Roberta Larson (2017). *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics complete food and nutrition guide*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Foundation for Fresh Produce. Asparagus. Have a Plant. Available at: <https://fruitsandveggies.org/fruits-and-veggies/asparagus/>.

Resources

For information about growing asparagus, check out the resource from UK's Center for Crop Diversification at <https://www.uky.edu/ccd/sites/www.uky.edu/ccd/files/asparagus.pdf>.

For more information on using your fresh asparagus, consider Plate It Up! Kentucky Proud recipes <https://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/plate-it-kentucky-proud>.

The recipes listed can be found at [Plan.Eat.Move.com](https://www.plan-eat-move.com) where you can find additional recipes using asparagus in a variety of ways.

For more information on different cooking methods, check out *Savor the Flavor: Exploring Cooking Methods* (FCS 3-634).

For more information on preserving food, check with your local county Extension office.

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