



Adding Color to Your Life

PLANTING ASPARAGUS ROOTS

Asparagus is a long-lived plant. By carefully preparing your bed before setting out your roots, you will ensure good production for many years.

Asparagus roots need a thick layer of soil protection from the elements, so they have to be planted deeply. Dig a trench 12 inches deep and about 18 inches wide. At the base of the trench loosen the soil another 8 inches or so, and add ½ pound of 10-20-10 garden fertilizer to each 10' stretch of trench. Cover the fertilizer with 4 inches of well-decomposed compost. Firm this loose base by walking on it, and then level it with a rake or hoe, leaving the trench 8 to 10 inches deep.

When planting, fan the roots of the asparagus plant out like an octopus, and lay them at 2 foot intervals along the floor of the trench. Asparagus roots are tender, so handle them carefully. Cover them gently with 2 inches of soil and water them in. The trench should now be about 6" deep. In two weeks to a month, depending on the weather, you will begin to see new shoots appear. These shoots gather the sun's energy and strengthen the roots. Let them grow up and gently add soil to the trench as they get taller, until the trench has largely been filled in. Allow the shoots to go to seed and as the summer progresses the foliage will brown and fall over. This can be cut back nearly to the ground in the fall and recycled in your compost pile.

Asparagus is slow to mature, so be patient! It will be two years before you have your first harvest. When the stems are about 8 inches tall and ½ inch or greater in diameter, they can be gathered. The first harvest should be kept to a minimum, so that as many stems as possible will grow on and nourish the plants in the following years. No tool is necessary for the harvest; just bend the succulent stems until they break, because any portion of the stem that is too tough to break is too tough to eat. On the sad day when there are no stems fatter than ½ inch in diameter, the season is spent and the plants are ready to enter their revival period. Let them grow on and go to seed. Side dress the rows with a 10-20-10 garden fertilizer in May, June, and July each year, using a small handful for each plant, being sure to keep the fertilizer itself away from direct contact with the plant's stems.

With a little care, your asparagus bed will provide you years of enjoyment and delicious meals.