



Home on the Range

Asparagus: Elegant Springtime Vegetable

A good source of Vitamin C and folic acid, asparagus has no fat, cholesterol or sodium.

When selecting asparagus, look for bright green stalks with closed, compact, firm tips. If the tips are slightly wilted, freshen them up by soaking in cold water. At home, keep asparagus moist and cool until using. Loosely wrap it in the refrigerator bin.

Asparagus is simple and quick to cook by a variety of methods. Most cooks prefer it crisp-tender but adjust the cooking time if you like it more tender.

• To boil, place whole spears or pieces of asparagus in a skillet of boiling water. Cook uncovered 3 to 5 minutes or until crisp-tender.

• To microwave, place one pound asparagus spears or pieces in a shallow microwave-safe dish with tips toward the center. Microwave on High 6 to 9 minutes for whole spears and 5 to 7 minutes for pieces. Stir or rearrange halfway through cooking.

• To stir-fry, cut asparagus spears into approximately 2-inch pieces and cook in hot oil or butter over medium-high heat until crisp-tender, stirring constantly, about 3 to 5 minutes.

• To steam, tie bundles of asparagus together and place in steamer with enough water to cover lower half of spears. Cover steamer; cook until crisp-tender, about 5 to 7 minutes.

Here are some recipes to create unique, flavorful dishes using asparagus. Enjoy!

PERFECT ASPARAGUS

12-ounces fresh asparagus spears

1 to 2 tablespoons butter
2 to 3 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

2 to 3 teaspoons finely chopped fresh chives, parsley, or chervil (optional)

Salt and pepper

Trim or break asparagus at the tender point; rinse. Place asparagus in large skillet with boiling water to cover; simmer, uncovered, 3 to 5 minutes or until crisp-tender. Drain well.

Meanwhile melt butter with lemon juice in small saucepan; stir in herbs, if desired. Spoon over asparagus. Season with salt and pepper, as desired. Makes 4 servings.

SPRINGTIME QUICHE

Crust:

1 cup all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup butter
2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives
2 tablespoons cold water

Filling:

2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
1 cup cooked shredded chicken
6 slices crispy cooked bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
¼ pound fresh asparagus
1½ cups half and half or milk
4 eggs, slightly beaten
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper

Heat oven to 400 degrees. In medium bowl, combine flour and salt; cut in butter until crumbly. Stir in chives and water (mixture will be crumbly). Shape into ball.

On lightly floured surface, roll dough into 12-inch circle, ¼-inch thick. Fold into quarters; unfold and ease into 10-inch quiche pan, pressing firmly against bottom and sides. Crimp or flute crust.

Spread cheese over bottom of crust; top with chicken. Sprinkle bacon over chicken. Place asparagus spears in spoke pattern on top of bacon.

In small bowl stir together all remaining filling ingredients. Pour over chicken mixture. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes or until golden and set in center. Let stand 10 minutes. Yield: 6 servings.

CREAM OF ASPARAGUS SOUP

1 pound fresh asparagus
½ cup water
6 cups chicken stock
½ cup chopped onion
¼ cup chopped celery
3 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoons flour
½ cup cream
Salt, paprika, white pepper, to taste

Chopped hard-cooked egg
Cut tips off asparagus and cook in water until tender. Remove and set aside.

Chop up the asparagus stalks and cook in chicken stock with onion and celery. Bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Put through sieve.

In a large double boiler, melt butter, stir in flour, cook 2 minutes. Gradually stir in cream, asparagus stock, seasonings to taste, and asparagus tips. Reheat but do not boil.

B. Light Lebanon



Take advantage of seasonal vegetables by preparing elegant Turkey Asparagus Roll-Ups.

CHICKEN AND ASPARAGUS SALAD

½ pound dry corkscrew macaroni
½ pound fresh asparagus
1 tablespoon water
1½ cups cubed cooked chicken
¾ cup wine vinegar
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
¾ cup sliced green onion
1 teaspoon dried dill weed
Lettuce
Cherry tomatoes

Cook macaroni according to package directions. Do not overcook. Drain and cool.

Cut asparagus in one-inch pieces. Place in microwave safe dish, sprinkle with water, cover and microwave for 3 to 4 minutes on high power. Drain.

In a small bowl, whisk together vinegar, oil, green onion, and dill weed.

In large bowl, combine macaroni, asparagus, and chicken. Toss with vinegar mixture, chill 2 hours.

To serve: toss mixture again. Lay lettuce leaf on plate, scoop 1½ cups salad on lettuce, garnish with cherry tomatoes.

Yields 3 to 4 servings.

B. Light Lebanon

CRISPY ASPARAGUS SALAD

3 cups thinly, diagonally sliced asparagus
1 cup each julienne jicama and sweet red pepper
2 tablespoons minced onion
¼ cup white wine vinegar
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1 tablespoons each vegetable oil and Dijon-style mustard
1 clove garlic, minced
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon bottled hot pepper sauce

Toss asparagus, jicama, red pepper, and onions together. Combine remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour mixture over vegetables and mix well. Makes 4 servings. Serving tip: Broiled or grilled chicken or fish may be served on salad for entree salad.

ASPARAGUS

1 pound asparagus
Water
4 tablespoons butter
1 hard-cooked egg

Cook asparagus until tender in water to cover. Remove from water, place in bowl. Lightly brown butter and pour over asparagus and sprinkle with chopped egg. Yields 4 servings.

B. Light Lebanon

ASPARAGUS IN CREAM

1 tablespoon butter
½ cup cream
Salt and pepper to taste
2 cups cut-up cooked asparagus, undrained

Add butter, cream, salt and pepper to cooked asparagus just before serving. Reheat, but do not boil. Serve in custard cups or ramekins.

Alicia Gross

Berks Co. Dairy Princess
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Featured Recipe

When it comes to asparagus, the thicker the better. That's the verdict that vegetable expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Science said.

"In supermarkets, shoppers see thin spears of asparagus bunched and marketed as 'tender gourmet' style," said Peter Ferretti, professor of vegetable crops. "In reality, spears that are larger than a half-inch in diameter are more tender and higher in soluble fiber and vitamins than the thinner spears."

A good source of Vitamin C and folic acid, asparagus has no fat, cholesterol or sodium.

Asparagus should either be prepared immediately or stored in refrigerator. The longer you let asparagus sit, the tougher it gets. Asparagus loses moisture very quickly, the sugars within the spear begin to turn to starch, and the spear develops woody tissue if left at room temperature. In thinner asparagus spears, this happens even faster.

Here's a recipe from the Washington Asparagus Commission. For more, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Commission, c/o Publicis, 190 Queen Anne Ave. N., Seattle WA 98109.

TURKEY ASPARAGUS ROLL-UPS

4 (8-12-ounce) turkey breast fillets
2 teaspoons Dijon-style mustard
12 to 16 small asparagus, cleaned, trimmed
½ cup shredded lowfat mozzarella cheese
2 tablespoons each minced parsley and shallots
Seasoned salt
Ground pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
¼ cup dry white wine

Gently pound turkey to length of asparagus spears; spread each slice with ½ teaspoon mustard. Place 3 to 4 asparagus spears toward one end of long side of turkey fillet. Sprinkle each with 2 tablespoons cheese and 1½ teaspoons each parsley and shallots; sprinkle with seasoned salt and pepper. Roll up turkey to enclose asparagus. Fasten with skewers or toothpicks. Brown turkey rolls in oil in oven-proof skillet; pour wine over and sprinkle with seasoned salt and pepper. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until turkey is cooked but not dry. If desired, add 2 tablespoons water to pan drippings, heat and serve over turkey rolls. Makes 4 servings. Serve with cooked rice or pasta.

Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for the topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522. Recipes should reach our office one week before publishing date listed below.

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