Interesting Facts About Asparagus

A distant cousin of the onion, Asparagus is also a member of the lilaceae family. Its history goes back as far as that of the leek and has been consumed for over 2000 years. Asparagus originated in the eastern Mediterranean countries and traces of wild varieties have been discovered in Africa.

The first known depiction of asparagus is on an Egyptian frieze that dates back to 3000 BCE. Bunches of asparagus can be seen on the walls of many tombs.

While the Greeks wild crafted the vegetable, it seems that the Romans were one of the first to cultivate and spread asparagus throughout their empire. In fact, a recipe for asparagus can be found in the oldest surviving cookbook written by a Roman, Apicius, De re coquinaria, Book III.

Greeks and Romans ate it fresh when in season, and dried the vegetable for use in winter; Roman Epicureans even froze it high in the Alps, for the Feast of Epicurus.

Hippocrates, the ancient Greek doctor, used asparagus to treat certain ailments and in the 1st century CE, Dioscorides, the Green physician, recommended a decoction of the root to improve urine flow and to treat kidney problems, jaundice, and sciatica. He also recommended holding the chewed root against aching teeth.

The first written mention of asparagus in English was in 1000 AD, and the peasants at that time would refer to it as “sparrow grass”.

Asparagus was a favorite food of King Louis XIV. Frenchmen started to cultivate asparagus in the greenhouse to ensure year-round stashes of this vegetable.

Asparagus was brought to North America by European settlers at least as early as 1655. Adriaen van der Donck, a Dutch immigrant to New Netherland, mentions asparagus in his description of Dutch farming practices in the New World. Asparagus was grown by British immigrants as well; in 1685, one of William Penn's advertisements for Pennsylvania included asparagus in a long list of crops that grew well in the American climate.

After removal of the woody end of asparagus, spears can be boiled, microwaved, cooked, fried, marinated or pickled. The easiest way to get asparagus into your diet is to eat it raw; simply cut it up and add to your salad. Another simple thing to do is to just steam it for a few minutes but be careful not to overcook it.

Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamin K, folate, copper, selenium, vitamin B1, vitamin B2, vitamin C, and vitamin E. It is a very good source of dietary fiber, manganese, phosphorus, vitamin B3, potassium, choline, vitamin A, zinc, iron, protein, vitamin B6, and pantothenic acid.

Asparagus is perennial plant. First harvest takes place 3 years after planting. Asparagus produces spears until the age of 15 to 20 years.

The fruit of Asparagus is a small red berry 6–10 mm diameter, which is poisonous to humans.



Asparagus tips:

- ✓ ***Floss Daily***
- ✓ ***Get More Exercise***
- ✓ ***Eat More Veggies***

RECIPE COURTESY OF FOOD NETWORK KITCHEN

Roasted Asparagus with Hollandaise

Prep: 5 min Cook: 10 min Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients

1 pound medium asparagus

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Sauce:

1 large egg yolk

1 1/2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Pinch cayenne pepper

4 tablespoons unsalted butter (1/2 stick)

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.
2. Trim the woody ends from the asparagus. Spread the spears in a single layer in a shallow roasting pan baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with salt, and roll to coat thoroughly. Roast the asparagus until lightly browned and tender, about 10 minutes, giving the pan a good shake about halfway through.
3. Meanwhile, put the egg yolk, lemon juice, and cayenne in a blender. Pulse a couple times to combine.
4. Put the butter in a small microwave proof bowl and heat in a microwave until just melted. With the blender running, gradually add the melted butter into the egg to make a smooth frothy sauce. If the sauce is really thick blend in a teaspoon of lukewarm water to loosen it up. Season with the salt and serve immediately or keep warm in a small heat-proof bowl set over hot (but not simmering) water until ready to serve.
5. Spread the roasted asparagus on a serving platter. Grind a generous amount of pepper over the top.

Cook's Note

This recipe can be easily doubled. If you double the recipe, be sure to place the stems on the baking sheet so that the tips are pointed toward the center, and the bottoms are pointed out, toward the edges of the pan. Since the tips are thinner than the stems, they tend to cook faster. However, when roasting, items at the edges of the pan cooked more quickly than those in the center. Taking the time to lace them this way helps the asparagus cook evenly.