

Asparagus Instructions

As a rough guide, ten established plants should yield about 3kg (7lb) of spears over a six week period each year, for up to twenty years. I have thirty crowns, which produce enough for regular meals for our family of two adults and two children.

Planting out

Plant your asparagus crowns out as soon as possible after you receive them.

Prepare the bed by digging in well-rotted manure and removing perennial weeds. Asparagus likes the soil freely drained, so add grit if gardening on heavy clay. It's also important to keep the bed free of weeds – they compete with the crowns – so mulch deeply with grit or compost in early spring.

Soak the crowns for an hour before planting, then plant 30cm (12in) apart. Leave 1m (39in) between the rows. Dig a wide trench about 20cm (8in) deep and 30cm (12in) wide. Form a ridge of soil down the centre of the trench, about 10cm (4in) high. Place the crown on the ridge, draping the roots either side. Cover with about 5cm (2in) of soil, then add more soil as the stems grow, aiming to completely fill the trench by autumn. Keep well watered.

Harvesting

Do not harvest spears in the first year after planting, and then only harvest a few in the following year. After that, you should be able to cut lots of spears. When the crowns stop producing heavily, they are coming to the end of their natural season. Stop harvesting then and allow the ferns to grow.

Maintenance

Give a high-nitrogen feed in early summer to encourage the ferns. Cut them to the ground in late autumn when the ferns are brown. Watch out for asparagus beetle – a small yellow and black beetle with a red head. They and their buff-coloured grubs eat the ferns, sometimes defoliating them completely and so weakening them. Pick these pests off whenever you see them.