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Cooperative Extension  
**Tulare County**

Agriculture and Natural Resources



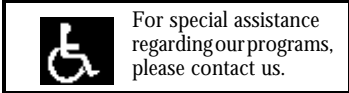
Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

## ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is a member of the lily family. The young shoot is the edible part of the plant, and its color ranges from green to white to purple. Asparagus is one of the earliest vegetables to appear in the spring and is rich in fiber and vitamins A and C. California ranks second in asparagus production nationwide with about 40% of the vegetable produced here. Harvesting typically begins in mid-February in the southern part of the state while late March and early April usually mark the beginning of the harvest further north. San Joaquin County grows the most asparagus in the state and celebrates annually with its Asparagus Festival in late April. Other counties that are top asparagus producers include Imperial, Monterey and Santa Barbara. The California crop usually is completed by the end of June. So grab those peak-of-the crop asparagus spears now while availability is wide and as prices especially reasonable.

Asparagus is a nutritionally well-balanced vegetable. It provides a wide array of nutrients in significant amounts for a healthy diet. Asparagus is a leading supplier among vegetables of folic acid. A 5.3 ounce serving provides 60% of the recommended daily allowance for folacin which is necessary for blood cell formation, growth, and prevention of liver disease. Folacin has been shown to play a significant role in the prevention of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida, that cause paralysis and death in 2,500 babies each year. Its wealth of nutrients, fiber and very low sodium and calorie content make asparagus a nutritionally wise choice for today's health-conscious consumer. Asparagus is low in calories, only 20 per 5.3 oz. serving-

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-that's less than 4 calories per spear! It contains no fat or cholesterol and is very low in sodium. It's also a good source of fiber (3 grams per serving) and potassium, various B vitamins as well as Vitamin A and Vitamin C.

### **Asparagus Cooking Tips:**

**Stove top:** In a saucepan or steamer cook fresh asparagus in a small amount of boiling water until tender. Fresh asparagus will be crisp-tender in 5 to 8 minutes. In a double boiler, percolator or asparagus steamer, steam asparagus in an upright position. Fasten the stalks into a bundle using a band of foil or string. Stand the stalks upright with the tips extending an inch or more above the boiling. Cover and cook until tender, 5 to 8 minutes.

**Stir-Fry:** Cut spears diagonally in ½ inch pieces, leaving tips whole. Stir-fry pieces in a small amount hot oil, in a skillet or wok at medium high heat. Stir constantly until tender-crisp--3 to 5 minutes.

**Microwave:** Microwave fresh asparagus by placing one pound in a microwavable baking dish or serving bowl. If cooking whole spears, arrange with tips in center. Add about ¼ cup water and cover tightly. Microwave at 100% power for 4 to 7 minutes for spears, 3 to 5 minutes for cuts and tips. Stir or turn halfway through cooking time. Microwave frozen asparagus by placing the frozen asparagus in a covered microwavable baking dish with 2 tablespoons of water. Cook at 100% power for 4 to 7 minutes, stirring or rearranging once. To warm canned asparagus in the microwave oven, drain all but 1 tablespoon of liquid, and microwave at 100% power for 2 to 4 minutes, stirring once halfway through cooking time.

For information on preserving fresh asparagus by pressure canning or freezing, contact your local University of California Cooperative Extension Office.

**Sources:** California Department of Food and Agriculture and the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board © 2000.

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