Asparagus has been cultivated for more than 2,000 years. It is a member of the lily family, which also includes onion, garlic, and leeks. There are only a few varieties of asparagus and these varieties are of two general types, based on the color of the spears: white and green. The more important group has spears that become dark green in sunlight. Asparagus is available from April through June. For information on varieties in Ohio, contact your county Extension educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Selection
- Asparagus spears should be straight and firm.
- Tips should be compact and pointed.
- Avoid wilted, limp, flat, or angular stalks.
- Fat is better than thin in asparagus. Assuming all else is the same, a thicker spear has more meaty pulp and will be more tender after cooking.
- An inch or two of tough woody base is normal. It actually helps maintain quality.

Storage
- Asparagus is a highly perishable vegetable, so it needs to be chilled as soon as possible and used quickly. Do not wash or store wet since this promotes bacterial growth.
- Asparagus loses its sweet flavor quickly if not kept at temperatures below 40 degrees F. Flavor deteriorates rapidly at room temperatures.
- Store in the coldest part of the refrigerator; use within a day or two.

Yield
Due to the many variables, including moisture content, size, and variety, it is impossible to give specific recommendations as to quantity to buy. The recommendations below are approximations.
- 1 pound of asparagus equals 2 to 3 servings.
- 1 crate equals 24 pounds or 15 to 22 pints, canned or frozen.
- 2½ to 4½ pounds asparagus equals 1 quart.

Nutrition
The “Dietary Guidelines for Americans” recommends that adults need 2 to 2½ cups of a variety of vegetables daily. Asparagus contains antioxidants that help prevent cancer, and substances that reduce inflammation that can lead to heart disease. Asparagus is an excellent source of folate, a good source of vitamins A and C, and a fair source of iron. Asparagus is low in sodium, so it is ideal for sodium restricted diets. One cup cooked, fresh asparagus has 35 calories.

Safe Handling
Clean surfaces, utensils, and hands after touching raw meat and poultry and before you use them on fresh produce. Wash asparagus just before using. To remove dirt, wash stalks thoroughly in several rinses of cold water. Remove scales with a knife if necessary.
Cut or break off tough, woody portions. The stalk will snap easily at this point. Scrub with a soft brush to remove sand. Do not use soap, detergent, or bleach as they can be absorbed into the vegetable. Leave stalks whole or cut Chinese style.

**Serving**

Asparagus has many uses in salads, soups, and hot main dishes.

Cook asparagus just before serving. Young, tender asparagus requires only a short time to cook. Tie the spears together, and stand them upright in a deep pan, filled two-thirds full with boiling water. The bottom of a double-boiler works well. Cook uncovered for 5 to 10 minutes; then cover and let the tips steam for 2 to 3 minutes. A tent of aluminum foil, or the top of a double boiler turned upside down, makes a good cover. The secret is to cook asparagus to the tender crisp stage, and serve while the spears are still bright green. Over-cooking, indicated by a change to dull green color, indicates flavor and vitamin loss.

**Serving Ideas**

- Tender tips make a great choice as a vegetable dipper.
- Use raw or quickly blanch for 2 minutes.
- Cook and serve with a small amount of butter, salt, and pepper.
- Add browned, slivered almonds to buttered, cooked asparagus.
- Vary with a dash of lemon juice or mace or sprinkle with bread or cracker crumbs.
- Season with allspice, dill weed, marjoram, or savory.

Written by Barbara A. Brahm, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences
Reviewed by Lydia Medeiros, Ph.D., R.D., Extension Specialist, Ohio State University Extension