



# *Vegetables for Wellness:* Kentucky Asparagus

Sandra Bastin, Ph.D., R.D., L.D., Food and Nutrition Specialist  
Jessica Hatchett, Family and Consumer Sciences Intern

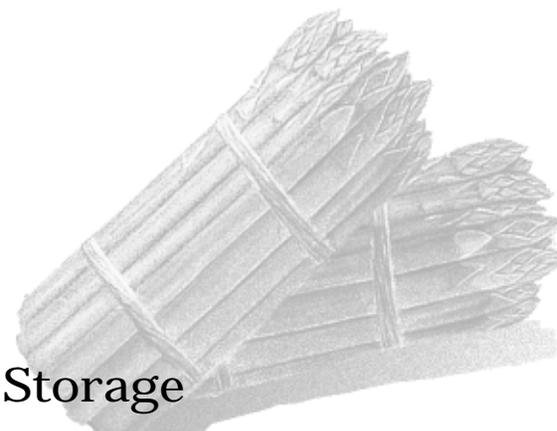
Nothing tastes better in the spring than Kentucky-grown asparagus! We can enjoy its freshness and flavor from April through May. Asparagus was first grown more than 2,000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean region and was brought to America by early colonists. It is the slender shoot of a perennial plant that ranges from pencil thin to about one-half inch in thickness. If you don't have a garden of your own, farmers' markets offer, along with other seasonal fruits and vegetables, asparagus picked at the peak of tenderness.

## Nutrition Facts

Asparagus is a good source of vitamin A and folate. Vitamin A is needed for vision, normal growth, reproduction, and a healthy immune system. Folate works with other vitamins to form hemoglobin in red blood cells, which supplies oxygen to the body's tissues. Folate also reduces the risk of neural tube defects. The U.S. Public Health Service advises 400 micrograms of folate daily for women who may become pregnant. One-half cup of fresh, steamed asparagus (about six spears) contains 22 calories, 2 grams of protein, and 4 grams of carbohydrates, with minimal amounts of fat and sodium.

## Selection

Choose bright green stalks with tightly closed tips. The earliest, most tender stalks are an apple green color with purple-tinged tips. Quality spears should be 6 to 8 inches long. The tougher, woody base of the stalks should be not much more than an inch in thickness. It is best to select stalks of uniform thickness to ensure uniform cooking. In season, farmers' markets usually have a good selection of asparagus from which to choose.



## Storage

Asparagus becomes tough and woody and loses its sweet flavor soon after harvest, so for peak flavor and texture, asparagus should be prepared the day it is picked or bought. However, fresh asparagus will keep up to one week in the refrigerator. It should be stored in the vegetable bin. Refrigerate spears upright with stem ends in water, or refrigerate with the cut ends wrapped in wet paper towels or cloth and the asparagus enclosed in a plastic bag.

To preserve your garden bounty, asparagus may be canned or frozen following USDA-recommended guidelines. Twelve 2-pound bunches of asparagus will yield 15 to 22 pints frozen. Freezing instructions are outlined in the publication *Freezing Vegetables* (FCS3-335), available from your local Extension office or on the Web at <[www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pubs.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pubs.htm)>.

## Preparation

A pound of asparagus will yield about four 1/2-cup servings, about six spears per serving. To prepare asparagus for eating, either remove the outer layer of the tough asparagus stem with a vegetable peeler or simply break the stalk by hand where it snaps easily. Wash asparagus thoroughly with cool, running water. Leave stems whole or cut diagonally into pieces that are 1 to 2 inches in length. Eat asparagus raw, or lightly boil, steam, or stir-fry it for a tasty side dish. Chives, parsley, tarragon, and thyme enhance the sweet flavor of asparagus. You can also try seasoning it with butter, lemon pepper, or Parmesan cheese.

## Springtime Asparagus Salad

### **Salad:**

**1 pound asparagus, washed**  
**1 head of green leaf lettuce, washed and chopped**  
**2 medium tomatoes, sliced**  
**1/4 pound medium shrimp, cooked**  
**1 lemon, sliced thin**

### **Vinaigrette:**

**4 tablespoons olive oil**  
**2 to 3 tablespoons lemon juice**  
**1/4 teaspoon salt**  
**1/8 teaspoon ground pepper**  
**1 tablespoon parsley, minced**

Mix vinaigrette ingredients and refrigerate. Steam asparagus until just tender and cool. Place leaf lettuce on plates and add six tomato slices to each plate. Place a portion of cooked asparagus and shrimp on the plate. Garnish with lemon slices. When ready to serve, drizzle vinaigrette over the salad. Yield: 4 servings. *Nutritional Analysis: 209 calories, 12 g protein, 11 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 16 g fat, 52 mg cholesterol, 215 mg sodium.*

## Asparagus Quiche

**9-inch pastry shell**  
**8 slices of bacon, cooked crisp**  
**2 cups cooked asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces**  
**1 cup Swiss cheese, shredded**  
**1 cup low-fat milk**  
**3 eggs, lightly beaten**  
**1/4 teaspoon nutmeg**  
**Dash of pepper**  
**1 teaspoon dried tarragon**  
**1/2 teaspoon salt**

Prick pastry shell with fork and bake in preheated 450°F oven for 7 minutes. Cool. Layer crumbled bacon, asparagus, and cheese in pie shell. In a bowl, mix low-fat milk, eggs, and seasonings. Pour over cheese. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes or until set. Yield: 8 servings. *Nutritional Analysis: 240 calories, 13 g protein, 12 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 15 g fat, 108 mg cholesterol, 585 mg sodium.*

—From the Woodford County Extension Homemakers

## Sugared Asparagus

**3 tablespoons butter or margarine**  
**2 tablespoons brown sugar**  
**2 pounds fresh asparagus, cut into 2-inch pieces (about 4 cups)**  
**1 cup chicken broth**

Heat butter and brown sugar in a skillet on medium-high heat until sugar is dissolved. Add asparagus and sauté for 2 minutes. Stir in chicken broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes or until asparagus is crisp-tender. Remove asparagus to a serving dish and keep warm. Cook remaining sauce, uncovered, until reduced by half. Pour over asparagus and serve immediately. Yield: 4 to 6 servings. *Nutritional Analysis: 128 calories, 5 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 9 g fat, 23 mg cholesterol, 455 mg sodium.*

For additional in-season recipes on the Web, go to Family and Consumer Sciences Extension, the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, at <[www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs)>.

## References

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