

May: National Asparagus Month

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Asparagus has been cultivated for culinary and medicinal purposes for more than 2,000 years. Versatile and healthy, it can be eaten raw or cooked, and is used fresh, frozen, or canned. Asparagus is



generally available from April through June. Asparagus can be used in salads, side dishes, entrées or as an appetizer, and can be

boiled, steamed, microwaved, roasted, or stir-fried. May is National Asparagus Month. Check out the following tips and information on buying, storing, and adding asparagus to a healthful eating plan. *Photo courtesy of <http://discoveringfoods.blogspot.com/2013/03/asparagus-sign-of-spring.html>*

Selection, storage, and preparation tips:

Nutrition and health. Five medium asparagus spears have about 20 calories. All asparagus spears



are not the same size, but this can be used as a general estimate. Asparagus has no saturated fat, sodium or cholesterol, is high in folate, and is a good

source of vitamin A and C.



Selection and storage.

Choose odorless asparagus stalks with dry, tight tips that are similar in size. Avoid purchasing limp or wilted stalks.

Refrigerate unwashed asparagus for up to four days by wrapping the end of stalks in a wet paper towel and placing in a plastic bag.



Cleaning and preparing. Rinse asparagus stalks

thoroughly in cool water to remove dirt and sand. Bend asparagus so that it snaps at its natural breaking point. This will remove the woody bottom.



Cooking methods.

When boiling asparagus, cook it in a wide skillet, with about 1 inch of water. If desired, add about 1

teaspoon of salt to the water. A good method when using asparagus in salads and cold dishes is blanching. Place asparagus in boiling water for about 3 minutes. Remove and immediately place in an ice bath. When roasting, cover a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and then place asparagus in a single layer on the sheet. Coat with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Rub to coat all spears with oil. Bake in an oven at 450 degrees Fahrenheit (F) for about 10 to 15 minutes. Purchase thick spears for grilling. Place asparagus spears on a medium-high heat grill coated with olive oil spray and cook for about 5 to 8 minutes until tender, turning occasionally. *Photo courtesy of <http://discoveringfoods.blogspot.com/2013/03/asparagus-sign-of-spring.html>*



Great additions to meals and side dishes.

Add steamed pieces of asparagus to scrambled eggs or

omelets. Spread a soft cheese on whole-wheat crackers and top with a crisp asparagus head for an appetizer or snack. Place fresh or frozen asparagus in a microwave-safe container or in a sauté pan with a small amount of water, low-sodium seasonings, and garlic for a side dish or snack. Put fresh asparagus in a plastic bag, drizzle with olive oil, pepper, and other seasonings, shake until coated, and then bake in the oven at 400 degrees F until crisp.

Asparagus is a long-lived perennial vegetable crop that is enjoyed by many gardeners. It can be productive for several years if given proper care. For more information about planting and caring for

asparagus check out <http://byf.unl.edu/asparagus>. For more food, nutrition and health information from Nebraska Extension go to www.food.unl.edu.

Recipe Ideas with Asparagus!

Roasted Asparagus and Spring Greens Salad (Serves 6):

- **Ingredients:** 3 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, 1 pound asparagus, trimmed, ½ cup shallots, finely minced, ¼ cup lemon juice, preferably fresh, 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard, ¼ teaspoon black pepper, ¼ teaspoon salt, 6 cups baby spring greens, and 6 Tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese.
- **Directions:** Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Place asparagus on a large rimmed baking sheet in a single layer. Drizzle with one tablespoon oil. Roast until crisp-tender, about 10-12 minutes. Set aside to cool. *Dressing:* In a small bowl, whisk shallots, lemon juice, mustard, pepper and salt and remaining two tablespoons olive oil. Toss greens with about one-half of dressing. Place greens on a serving platter. Top with asparagus. Top asparagus with more dressing and cheese.
- **Source:** <http://go.unl.edu/5dgg>

Additional Resources & Links:

SNAP-Ed Connection – Asparagus. Check out this collection of recipes and resources related to Asparagus. <http://snap.nal.usda.gov/nutrition-through-seasons/seasonal-produce/asparagus>

Freezing and Canning Asparagus. Two-page Brochure from Nebraska Extension on freezing and canning asparagus. <http://go.unl.edu/v5mz>

Growing Asparagus in the Home Garden. Fact sheet from Ohio State University Extension. <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1603.html>

All the Healthy Bites. *Healthy Bites* is a newsletter that focuses on a different food, nutrition and / or health theme for each month. http://food.unl.edu/fnh/healthybites_archives

Cook it Quick. Our goal is to make you "hungry for healthy food" by offering tips and delicious, quick-to-prepare, inexpensive recipes.

<http://food.unl.edu/fnh/cook-it-quick-recipes>

Walk Nebraska. Walk Nebraska is a monthly newsletter designed to help you achieve a healthier lifestyle by making walking an important part of your personal fitness program.

<http://food.unl.edu/fnh/walknewsletters>

Food Fun for Young Children. Serving up quick, healthy snack ideas for younger children.

<http://food.unl.edu/fnh/food-fun-for-young-children>

Nebraska Extension Food, Nutrition, and Health by the Month Calendar. National Food Days, Weeks, and Months for May.

<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/may>

Sources:

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3. Jones, G. Spring Recipes Brochure. In Partnership with: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Buy Fresh, Buy Local Nebraska, Nebraska Local Food Network, and Nebraska Cooperative Development Center. Accessed at: <https://food.unl.edu/documents/4089482/10167402/Brochure+Spring+2014.pdf/943212f0-1433-44de-bba6-98af83242d40>.
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