



## PERENNIAL VEGETABLES

# Asparagus: Conovers Colossal

*Asparagus officinalis*



## Asparagus officinalis

**PLANT TYPE** Vegetable

**PLANT HABIT** Perennial

**USES** Culinary, Pollinators

### DESCRIPTION

Asparagus is an herbaceous perennial producing delicious edible shoots in the spring. Grows with stout stems with much-branched, feathery foliage.

Asparagus is a deeply rooted perennial; the roots can penetrate several feet deep, yet don't like wet feet.

Since asparagus often originates in maritime habitats, it thrives in soils that are too saline for normal weeds to grow. Thus, a little salt was traditionally used to suppress weeds in beds intended for asparagus; this has the disadvantage that the soil cannot be used for anything else.

As asparagus plants can crop for about 20 years, it's worth choosing your planting site carefully and preparing the ground well. This long-term crop needs a dedicated, permanent bed of several square metres, depending on how many plants you want to grow. Plantings should be spaced them up to 45cm apart.

Asparagus is a dioecious plant, meaning plants are either male or female, producing flowers with either stamens or pistils, and never both. One female plant inside a patch of males will produce dozens and dozens of viable seed annually. The plants are indistinguishable until after the bees have had their fill and the fruit develops; the plants with the red berries in late summer are the females. Plants will likely flower in their second year and the flowers are loved by pollinators.

Male plants tend to produce spears that are smaller and thinner, while female plants tend produce larger and thicker spears. The thickness of stalks is not an indication of their tenderness; they are thick or thin from the moment they sprout from the ground.

**RECOMMENDED LOCATION** Kitchen garden

**ASPECT** Full sun

**HEIGHT** 1-1.5m

**HARDINESS** Hardy in the UK

### MANAGEMENT AND CARE

The shoots are harvested in spring. After the first few shoots have been taken the plant should be then left to grow for the rest of the season. Growing from seed: If established early and transplanted well, asparagus can produce a harvestable crop of spears in year two.

### ORIGIN/HISTORY

Asparagus was used as a food in legend by Emperor Augustus who coined the expression "faster than cooking asparagus" for quick action. A recipe for cooking asparagus is given in one of the oldest surviving collections of recipes (Apicius's 1st century AD *De re coquinaria*, Book III). In the second century AD, the Greek physician Galen mentioned asparagus as a beneficial herb, but as dominance of the Roman empire waned, so do mentions of asparagus. Afterwards, it continued to be popular in the Byzantine Empire.