

Bluestem Breezes
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Planting Asparagus

My how times change. Growing up, I despised the evenings I walked in to the kitchen and my mother was fixing asparagus. Now, I love it! Roasted asparagus? Yes, please!

Typically, I enjoy a new garden project each year. It's more manageable for me rather than "taking on the world" so to speak. This year's project is projected to be – an asparagus patch!

Although we're a few weeks early yet for planting asparagus, this is an ideal time to plan the location for an asparagus patch and prepare the soil bed. Remember, since asparagus is a perennial this planting will be here for several years, so consider adding it to the edge of your garden. Or, a raised bed is a great option. Asparagus prefers full sun and well-drained soil.

Proper soil prep is especially important for perennial crops. Take a soil test to ensure proper levels of nutrients. Work the soil as early in the spring as possible, but do not work wet soil as clods will form. Then, add two inches of organic matter and fertilizer to the surface and work again so the organic matter and fertilizer blend into the soil.

Asparagus is usually (and most easily) started from 1-year-old crowns. These crowns are planted deeply, about 8 inches deep. You may plant one crown per hole or place the crowns in a trench. Space plants 18 to 24 inches apart. Fill in the trench gradually over the growing season to encourage growth. March 15 to April 15 is the best planting time.

Varieties well adapted for our area include Jersey Giant, Jersey King, Jersey Knight, Jersey Supreme and Purple Passion. These are all male hybrids that will produce three times as much as our old Martha or Mary Washington varieties.

Males have a number of advantages over females in that they live longer, emerge earlier in the spring, are more productive, and eliminate potential volunteer plants that can reduce the productivity of a planting.

Weed control is very important. Competition with weeds slows establishment. A shallow hoeing should be all that is needed.

Asparagus spears should not be harvested the first year. During the first year, food reserves are being transported to the roots. We want to build the root system this first year to encourage successful plant establishment. So, remember that you can drool the first year and reap your rewards the second year.

For additional information on asparagus, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.