

Asparagus Information & Springtime Warnings

Spring is here and so is asparagus. Eastern Washington has the perfect springtime weather conditions for growing asparagus. It is usually available during the months of April, May and June. The best quality asparagus is generally cut early in the season.

If you pick asparagus along the roadsides, ditch bank or in orchards, be extremely careful. These areas are often treated with weed control chemicals. Chemical residue is long lasting and it cannot be washed off. Asparagus heads would be impossible to scrub clean of residue even if it could be washed off the stalks. Some chemicals are residual in the soils through which asparagus tips must push as they emerge. It's better to hunt for asparagus in fields away from roadsides that are less likely to have been sprayed.

When choosing asparagus, look for compact tips and smooth round spears. The spear should be a rich green or purplish green and stalks should be tender. For best flavor, select spears that are firm, fresh and crisp. Quality is not directly related to size. Stalks one-half inch in diameter are preferable. Keep fresh asparagus moist and cold. Cool it quickly. Store it in the refrigerator as soon as possible.

Clean asparagus gently but thoroughly. Sand and dirt often hide under the scales. You may need to scrape or brush the scales along the stalk. Do this under cool running water. Soak the spears in a salt water solution to get rid of any hiding insects.

General Guidelines for Safety

Vinegar is the key ingredient in a pickled asparagus recipe. **There must be at least as much vinegar as water.** If a recipe calls for less vinegar than water, increase the quantity of vinegar to equal the water. Any vinegar can be used as long as it is 5% acidity. White vinegar has a sharp, pungent taste. Cider vinegar has a more mellow taste but does not make as clear a brine as white vinegar. Sugar can be added to decrease the sour taste.

Customizing

Spices in all recipes can be adjusted to suit personal taste. **Do not alter other ingredients.** You can increase the amount of spices or add additional spices. Some suggestions are: mustard seed, celery seed, dried red pepper flakes, cumin seed and lemon pepper.



Pickled Asparagus

Fresh asparagus - about 4 pounds
2 quarts white vinegar
1 tablespoon pickling spice (omit cloves)

2 quarts water
½ cup salt
garlic, 1 clove per jar

Wash asparagus thoroughly in cool water. Cut into spears (6 inches long for quarts; 4 inches long for pints). Combine water, vinegar, salt and mixed pickling spices (that are tied into a clean, thin white cloth). Heat to boiling. Remove bag containing spices. Blanch asparagus in boiling water for 2 minutes. Cool asparagus immediately in ice water for 2 minutes. Drain.

Pack asparagus into jars with tip ends down. This will prevent the tips from breaking if the asparagus floats in the jars. Put 1 clove garlic in each jar. Cover with boiling brine to within ½ inch from top of jar. Adjust jar lids and process in a boiling water bath canner 10 minutes at altitudes of 0-1000 feet and 15 minutes at altitudes of 1001-6000 feet. Yield: About 4-5 quarts or 8 pints.

Pickled Asparagus -with pickling spice-

Fresh asparagus - about 4 pounds
2 quarts white vinegar
1 tablespoon pickling spice (remove cloves)

2 quarts water
½ cup salt
garlic, 1 clove per jar

Wash asparagus thoroughly in cool water. Cut into spears to fit jar size leaving ½ inch head space. Combine water, vinegar, salt, and mixed pickling spices (tied into a clean, thin white cloth). Heat to boiling. Remove bag containing spices.

Pack asparagus into jars with tip ends down. This will prevent the tops from breaking if the asparagus floats in the jars. Put 1 clove garlic in each jar. Cover with boiling brine to within ½ inch from top of jar. Adjust jar lids and process in a boiling water bath canner 10 minutes at altitudes of 0-1000 feet and 15 minutes at altitudes of 1001-6000 feet. Yield: About 4-5 quarts or 8 pints

Spicy Cajun Asparagus

Approximately 10 pounds asparagus
2 ¾ quarts cider vinegar
2 ½ quarts water
¼ cup salt
¾ cup brown sugar

Per jar add:
½ to 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
(or to taste)
1 teaspoon cumin seed
1 clove of garlic

Wash asparagus in cool water. Cut into spears to fit jar size, allowing ½ inch head space. Combine salt, vinegar, sugar and water. Heat to boiling. Pack asparagus into hot jars with tip ends down. Put garlic, cumin and red pepper in each jar. Cover with boiling brine to within ½ inch from top of jar. Adjust jar lids and process in a boiling water bath canner 10 minutes at altitudes of 0-1000 feet and 15 minutes at altitudes of 1001-6000 feet. Yield: 5-6 quarts or 12 pints.

Note: More brine may need to be made depending on size of asparagus and jars used.

Using a Hot Water Bath Canner

Only pickled asparagus can be processed in a hot water bath canner. Canned asparagus must be processed in a pressure canner.

Once the jars are filled and jar lids are put on, follow these steps:

1. Arrange the jars on the rack of a canner, half filled with water and heated to near boiling. Add more hot water if needed to bring the water level to 1 inch above the jar tops. Place a tight-fitting cover on canner.
2. When water comes to a full rolling boil, set the timer for the recommended processing time based on the altitude. Adjust stove burner to keep water boiling gently and steadily. Add boiling water if necessary to keep jars covered.
3. Immediately remove jars from canner at the end of processing. Spoilage could occur if jars are left in hot water.
4. Put jars on a rack or cloth so air can move freely around them. There should be no cold draft or fan blowing on the jars.

FREEZING ASPARAGUS

Wash and sort stalks by size. Leave whole or cut into 1 to 2-inch lengths. Blanch small stalks, 1½ minutes; medium stalks, 2 minutes; large stalks, 3 minutes.

To blanch: put asparagus into boiling water. Cover kettle and continue boiling. Begin counting time as soon as vegetables are placed in water. Cool immediately in cold running water or ice water for about the same length of time used for blanching. When cool, drain and pack in freezer bags and freeze.



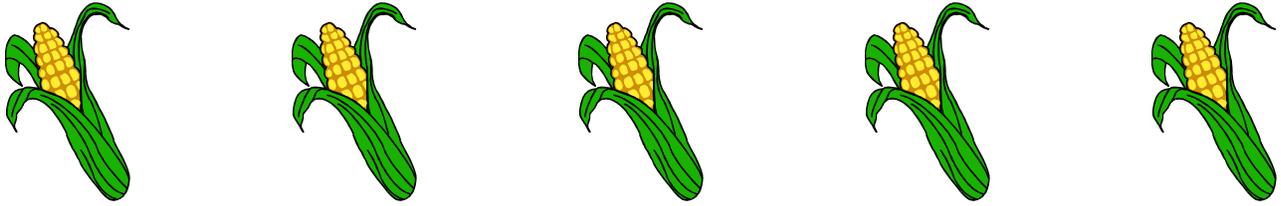
PRESSURE CANNING ASPARAGUS

Wash asparagus, trim off scales and tough ends. Wash again and cut into 1-inch pieces or leave whole.

To hot pack, cover with boiling water and boil for 2 to 3 minutes. Loosely pack in jars. Add ½ teaspoon salt per pint if desired. Cover with boiling cooking liquid. If liquid is gritty, use freshly-boiled water. To raw pack, pack tightly without crushing and cover with boiling water. Add salt if desired.

To process both hot pack and raw pack asparagus, add 2-3 inches of boiling water to pressure canner, place jars on rack in canner, exhaust steam for 10 minutes and then process under pressure. If you are canning at less than 1000 feet elevation with a weighted-gauge canner, process at 10 pounds for 30 minutes for pints and 40 minutes for quarts. Process at 11 pounds if using a dial-gauge canner at elevations less than 2000 feet.

Adjustments for higher elevations also depend on what type of pressure canner you use. For dial-gauge canners, process at 12 pounds between 2000 and 4000 feet, and at 13 pounds between 4000 and 6000 feet. If you use a weighted-gauge canner, process at 15 pounds for all elevations above 1000 feet. The processing times remain the same.



Pickled Miniature Corn

Blanch miniature ears of corn 30-45 seconds in boiling water or steam. Cool in air. Pack into pint or half-pint jars. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt per pint. Cover with mixture of 1 part water and 1 part vinegar, leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ inch headspace. Add spice if desired. Process in simmering hot (180-190°F) water bath for 15 minutes.