

Asparagus-Teaching Points Grades 5-6

Reasons to Eat Asparagus

- ❖ An excellent source of vitamin K.
- ❖ Vitamin K helps blood to clot.
- ❖ An excellent source of folate (one of the B vitamins.)
- ❖ Folate helps make red blood cells.
- ❖ A good source of vitamin C.

How Much Do I Need?

- ❖ A serving of asparagus is about ½ cup cooked. This is about 5 medium spears.
- ❖ Eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables throughout the day to help you get the amount you need.
- ❖ It is recommended for kids 5-12 years old to eat from 2 ½ cups to 5 cups per day. *Ranges take into account three activity levels: sedentary, moderately active and active.*

Eat Your Colors

- ❖ Asparagus is in the green color group. Green fruits and vegetables help maintain vision health and strong bones and teeth.
- ❖ Name some examples of green fruits and vegetables. (*Green bell peppers, celery, chile peppers, collard greens, cucumber, limes, spinach, zucchini, and yard long beans.*)
- ❖ Eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables every day may lower the risk of developing some cancers.

What's in a Name?

- ❖ In Spanish, asparagus is espárrago.
- ❖ Asparagus is a member of the Lily family and is related to onions, leeks and garlic.
- ❖ The word asparagus is derived from a Greek work meaning “sprout” or “shoot”.
- ❖ Asparagus can be harvested in three different colors: green, white and purple.
- ❖ Green asparagus is most commonly grown.
- ❖ Purple asparagus spears turn green when cooked.

History Explorations

Asparagus has been cultivated for more than 2,500 years by people worldwide. Have students research a historical topic of interest and then write an essay. Topics may include:

- ❖ Research the early beginnings of the California asparagus industry. Who were the first people to start growing asparagus? Why did the growers produce more green asparagus?
- ❖ Research the medicinal uses of asparagus. Hypothesize why asparagus was used for these purposes.
- ❖ Choose a culture, group of people or country and research the role asparagus has played in its society or agricultural economy. Include significant recipes, holidays, medicinal uses, literature and/or economic impact.



Student Sleuths

- ❖ Asparagus are grown from “crowns”. Crowns are the underground stem of the asparagus plant. Farmers plant the crowns. Growing asparagus from the crown is faster than growing them from seed. White asparagus are grown from the same crown as green. Why are they white?

Farmers bury the crowns one foot in the soil so the spears are completely covered by soil as they grow. This prevents photosynthesis from happening- a process that turns the stems green.

Student Advocates-Promote National TV-Turnoff Week

- ❖ Challenge students to keep the TV turned off for one week.
- ❖ Have students make a list of other activities they could do in place of watching TV.
- ❖ Encourage students to write journal entries of what they would do instead of watching TV

How Does Asparagus Grow?

- ❖ Asparagus is a long-lasting perennial plant (about 15-20 years).
- ❖ It takes 3 years for an asparagus plant to produce spears.
- ❖ The plant can live about 15-20 years.
- ❖ Asparagus plants need a period of rest. This is called dormancy. This dormancy occurs naturally in California during the winter.
- ❖ Asparagus is harvested by hand.

Asparagus

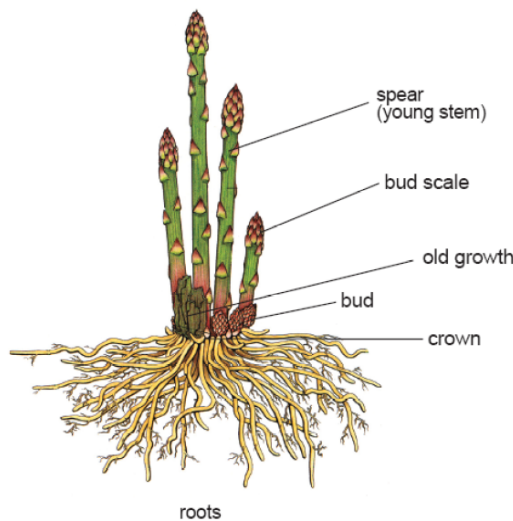


Image adapted from:
Stinky and Stringy: Stem & Bulb Vegetables, Meredith Sayles Hughes, 1999.

Home Grown Facts

- ❖ California is the leading supplier of asparagus, producing nearly half of the supply for the United States.
- ❖ The harvest season for asparagus is 2-3 months.
- ❖ In California, asparagus can be bought in the grocery stores from January through September.

Just the Facts

- ❖ For a one cup serving, asparagus has the highest folate of any vegetable.

- ❖ Long ago, people used crushed asparagus tips to reduce swelling and ease the pain from bee stings, wounds and infections.
- ❖ In the right conditions, asparagus can grow as much as one inch per hour up to 12 inches in one day.

Cafeteria Connections

Conduct an Asparagus Trivia Contest. Use the newsletter or teaching points to create sets of trivia information, questions and answers. Following are ideas for getting started:

- ❖ Create table tents with trivia asparagus factoids.
- ❖ Place tents on cafeteria tables.
- ❖ Create trivia questions and distribute questionnaire to students in lunch line (or as students enter the cafeteria).
- ❖ Students find answers while eating lunch (factoids on table tents) and enter their questionnaire into a drawing for prizes.



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