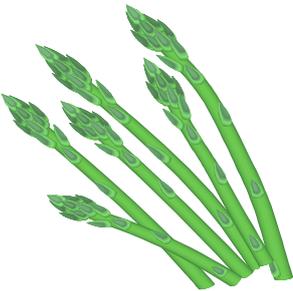


## Fact Sheet

# Asparagus, Rhubarb & Potatoes

### Asparagus



A perennial vegetable dating back to Roman times, Asparagus will often produce excellent crops for 20 years or more. Asparagus can be grown from seed, although generally gardeners plant 2 year old crowns in winter. Only the male plants produce reliable crops, with the variety usually sold being “ Mary Washington”.

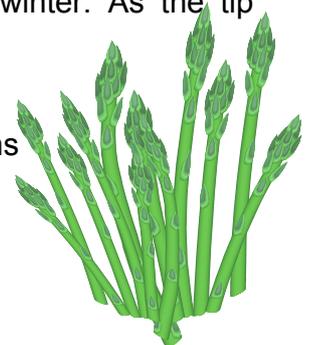
Crowns should be planted in well prepared beds that are high in organic matter and well drained. If the area gets too wet in winter, the crowns are likely to rot. Set crowns 15 - 20cm deep and 30 - 50cm apart at the bottom of a trench along the row. Cover with about 5cm of soil filling in the remainder as the fern grows.

It is important not to cover new shoots. Water and feed with high nitrogen fertiliser generously throughout summer. In winter when the fern goes yellow, cut down to the ground and fertilise in late winter. Spears can be harvested from August/September, every day or two for 8 to 10 weeks.

Do not begin harvesting the plant until it is 3 years old, and then only moderately until well established (5 years). Cut spears when 15 - 20cm long and before the tips open.

For white spears, mound the soil over the row, 25 - 30cm high in winter. As the tip breaks the soil surface, cut the spear about 15cm below the surface.

Stop harvesting by December and allow the fern to develop so the crowns can be built up for next season's crop.



## Rhubarb

Also a perennial vegetable, Rhubarb is best grown in its own bed and allowed to remain there for 4 or so years, undisturbed. Generally Rhubarb is grown from crowns purchased during winter, although it is possible to grow it from seed.

The main variety sold is “Everred”. Plant crowns about 60 to 80cm apart in rows, with the buds of the crowns just below the surface. Rhubarb needs good drainage along with regular watering and generous applications of fertilizer - such as manure, and 8.4:10 in late winter and early summer.



The plants should be lifted and divided every 6 years or so. They will grow in full sun or part shade. Harvest Rhubarb by taking the outer stems and twisting them away from the base of the plant. Allow the plant to establish for a year or two before harvesting heavily. Cut out any flowering stems and **do not** eat the leaves as they are poisonous.



## Potatoes

Potatoes are easy to grow as long as the soil is well drained and rich in organic matter. Always plant certified seed that is free from tuber-borne virus diseases.

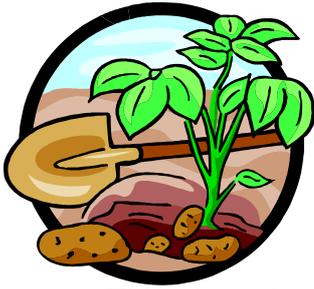
Because of the possible viruses it is best to plant new certified seeds from each season.

It is a good idea to “green - sprout” seeds before planting. This is done by placing the seed tubers on trays and leaving them for a week or two in a well-lit, dry, well-ventilated area. Allow the skin to go green and short stubby sprouts develop from the eyes.

Ideally the tubers should weigh 50 - 60 grams since then they can be planted whole. If they are large, cut them into sets with at least two eyes per piece. Do this at time of planting and do not leave exposed for more than a minute or two.

When planting, prepare the bed with furrows about 15 - 20 cm deep and 60 - 75 cm apart, apply a complete fertiliser and cover with about 5 cm of soil. Space the seed tubers in the furrows, sprouts up, about 20 - 25 cm apart and cover with soil. Sprouts should emerge within 3 - 6 weeks depending on the time of year.





Potatoes are very susceptible to frost and so need to be protected, if there is a risk, cover with 30 - 50 cm of straw, which can be removed when frosts have passed. When the plants are around 15 cm high, "hilling" should begin. Do this by dragging loose soil from between the rows to form a ridge against the plants. Repeat this once or twice.

This gives the potatoes support, prevents them turning green and protects them from the grub of the potato moth. Keep well watered until the tops have become yellow.

Early sown potatoes are generally harvested as new potatoes once flowering has occurred and the lower leaves begin to yellow. Other main crop varieties are left in the ground until about 2 weeks after the tops have completely died off and the skins are firm. When digging up the potatoes take care not to damage the tubers. Allow potatoes to dry off for about 2 weeks and then store them in a cool dark place.

#### **Potatoe Varieties that are available:**

- Bintje - mid season, all purpose, smooth pale yellow skin.
- Bismark - early, boiling and chipping, creamy white.
- Kennebec - early mid-season, excellent all-purpose, creamy white.
- Pinkeye - early season, baking and boiling, yellow waxy.
- King Edward - mid late season, all purpose, white creamy.
- Tasman - mid season, all purpose, white flesh
- Up to Date - mid season, all purpose, cream

**Early varieties:** Pinkeye, Bismark, plant in frost free areas as early as May - July and so ready for harvest from late September as new potatoes.

**Early - mid season varieties:** Kennebec, plant from July to Dec. Ready for harvest as new potatoes from early Nov, or leave to mature.

**Mid - late varieties:** Bintje, King Edward, Tasman, Up to Date. Plant from Sept. to Nov. and harvest February onwards.

