



# ASPARAGUS

## INTRODUCTION

Asparagus originated in the Eastern Mediterranean and was a favourite of the Greeks and Romans who used it as a medicine. In parts of Europe, Turkey, Africa, Middle East and Asia some varieties of asparagus grow wild.

In some countries people prefer to eat white asparagus (it stays white because it is grown out of the sun), but in New Zealand we like it green and there is little, if any, white grown. A limited amount of purple asparagus is available in New Zealand, but this would account for less than 1% of sales.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Choose straight firm green stems. Insist on fresh, clean product with trimmed ends and a minimum of white butt.

Buy small quantities regularly. Whilst asparagus will keep for about a week, it tastes a lot better when eaten within 1–2 days.

## HOW TO KEEP

Store at 2–4°C with approximately 95% relative humidity. Asparagus has a high water content and will lose water if stored in a dry environment. Store with butt ends on wet foam pads. The butt end must be kept wet to avoid dehydration. Asparagus is ethylene sensitive which means it should be stored separately from ethylene producing produce.

Consumer storage: Keep asparagus refrigerated and use promptly. Butt ends should be either wrapped in wet paper towels, stood up on wet foam pads or stood up in a jar of 1–2 cm of water. Another method, but not quite as effective, is to simply refrigerate in plastic bags.

## NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamin K, essential for blood clotting. It provides a good source of fibre and vitamins A, C, and B.

## HOW TO PREPARE

Snap off tough ends. These ends could be used to flavour soups or stocks. Cooked asparagus should be tender but still slightly crisp. For maximum flavour, don't overcook it. Asparagus in salads is generally blanched, however if the asparagus is thin and fresh it may be used raw. Purple asparagus is often eaten raw.

## WAYS TO EAT THIS VEGETABLE

Lightly steam, stir-fry, microwave or boil asparagus. Bake or barbecue in a glaze. You can serve it by itself or with a simple sauce. Asparagus can be used in all sorts of dishes — soups, quiches, pies, salads, stir-fries, casseroles and with fresh bread.

## WHEN YOU CAN GET IT

September until January.

## **TIPS FOR RETAILING**

Asparagus is one of the most highly perishable vegetables and so special care must be taken. Make sure displays contain only crisp snappy spears. Discard any limp or damaged spears. Display with butt ends on wet foam pads. The butt end must be kept wet to avoid dehydration. Trim butt ends daily to maintain a fresh crisp product. Bring out only what is required for display and replenish your display from the chiller. You are better to keep your display relatively small and keep stocking it. Return unsold stock to the chiller at the end of the day. Bunch asparagus to enhance sales.