PLANT FACT SHEET

Asparagus officinalis L.

GENUS *Asparagus* **FAMILY** Asparagaceae

COMMON NAMES Asparagus

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Shoots, Vegetable, Roots, Seeds - coffee

The young shoots are eaten cooked. They should only be washed just before cooking.
The tuberous roots of some wild asparagus plants are eaten in China. Young roots should be used.
The seeds have been used as a substitute for coffee.

DESCRIPTION

A herb. A perennial plant with leaves like a feather and an underground root stock. It grows to 1.5 m high and spreads to 1 m across. The stems are erect but often hang over at the tips. The branches are soft. The leaves are feathery and a rich green colour. The flowers are small and greenish. They are of both sexes and occur either singly or in clusters of 2-4. The fruit are red berries. They are produced on female plants. They are 7-8 mm across. There are 2 or 3 seeds.

HABITAT

It is a temperate or Mediterranean plant. It needs a temperature of 16-24°C for good growth. It needs a lower temperature for 60-100 days when the plants are dormant. In Papua New Guinea it is grown mainly in the highlands at over 1000 m altitude in the tropics. It grows up to 2600 m. It can be grown on the tropical coast with special management. It prefers humus rich, moist, well drained soils. It does best in an open sunny position. It is frost resistant but drought tender. A pH of 6-6.8 is suitable. In China it grows naturally on the steppes in NW Xinjiang. It suits hardiness zones 4-8.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seed. It is best to soak the seeds for 24 hours then sow them in a nursery. They are transplanted after 8-12 months. A spacing or 1 m x 1 m is suitable. If white shoots are required, the shoots need to be kept covered with soil. Shoots turn green in sunlight. Plants can also be grown by division of the clump. These are planted 15 cm deep. For seed production a male plant is needed for each 4 female plants. Bees help pollination.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The first harvest is 18-24 months after planting. The shoots are cut before they open out into the ferny erect stems. They are cut below ground level when about 15-20 cm high.

NOTES

There are between 160-300 Asparagus species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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