

Flowering and seed production will lessen the vigor of the plant.

Flower stems will be thick, tubular and upright and have a large knob at the top.

### CARE AND WEED CONTROL

Weed control is important around small plants. Using an organic mulch will shade out weed seeds and eventually, the plants will be large enough to shade out any emerging weeds. Keep plants watered to maximize production. Plants may eventually become too large and produced stems become thin and spindly. Dividing plant roots once every five years or so can prevent this. Dig and divide the root in early May, just as new growth is beginning. It is desirable to have at least five buds in each division.

For more information and other helpful educational materials, contact:

Gretchen Voyle, Horticulture Educator  
MSU Extension - Livingston County  
2300 East Grand River Avenue, Suite 111  
Howell, MI 48843

517-546-9850 Fax: 517-546-5154

<http://co.livingston.mi.us/msuextension>

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status.

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

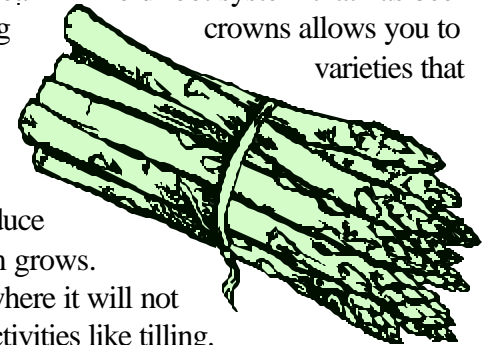
# Green Tips

## Plant and Grow Guides

### *Asparagus and Rhubarb (GT 101)*

#### Asparagus

Asparagus is a long-lived perennial vegetable crop that is planted as crowns. Crowns are the one year old root system that has been grown from seed. Buying crowns allows you to purchase the newer all-male varieties that out-produce the older kinds of asparagus. Plants can live as long as 15 years. Each year, a vigorous plant will produce more spears as the root system grows. Asparagus should be planted where it will not be disturbed by other garden activities like tilling.



#### PLANTING

Asparagus grows in any well draining soil. Wet soils can lead to root rot. Ideally, the soil pH should be 6.5-7.5. They do not grow well in acidic soils with a pH less than 6.0. Get a soil test before putting in your crowns. Follow the recommendations. Plant the asparagus in full sun. Dig a furrow five to six inches deep. Research has showed that planting the crowns deeper actually reduced the plant's yield. Apply about one pound of 0-46-0 per 50 feet of row at the bottom of the trench. Mix lightly into the soil. Put the crowns into the trench approximately 18 inches apart. Refill the trench but do not compact the soil. The new spears should come up after approximately one week if the soil temperature is above 50 degrees. Keep soil evenly moist.

## **PLANT SELECTION**

Select one of the new all-male varieties like Jersey Giant, Jersey Prince or Jersey Knight. These just produce spears, whereas the female plants expend energy on flowering and seed production. These are available from growers by catalogue or possibly from a nursery.

## **HARVEST**

Do not harvest any spears the first year. The second year, spears can be harvested lightly for a short period of time. Spears should be at least the diameter of a pencil and less than eight inches tall for harvesting. The tip should be firm and closed. Cut or break the spear at the ground line. Harvesting of spears should not continue after July 1.

## **CARE**

The spears eventually grow taller and the tips expand into ferns. Leave the ferns intact during the growing season. Ferns should be left over the winter to hold show in the garden and keep soil temperatures cooler and more stable. Remove the old ferns by mowing or cutting around April 1 before new growth begins.

## **WEED CONTROL**

Weed control is important for healthy, vigorous plants. The first year, do not use any chemical weed control products on the asparagus. Hoe or pull weeds to eliminate competition. The second year, look for labeled pre-emergent herbicides or mulch the area. Do not use rock salt as an herbicide. It will ruin the soil structure and can contaminate surrounding areas. After the last harvest of the season, when all the spears are removed, a glyphosate product like Roundup can be used to kill existing weeds. Do not spray any asparagus spears. Let the new spears mature into ferns. The large ferns will produce energy for the roots and shade the area to prevent additional weed growth.

## **Rhubarb**

Rhubarb is a cool season perennial vegetable that is grown for its tasty stems. The leaves are poisonous and cannot be eaten. Rhubarb grows best in full sun in well-draining soils with a high organic content. Plants

typically live for 15 or more years. They do best when divided periodically.

## **PLANTING**

Rhubarb should be planted where its roots will not be disturbed by tilling. Consider planting as a border or in the corners of a garden. Plants do best with a soil pH of 6.0-6.8. They can tolerate a pH as low as 5.0. Fertilization is critical to good production. Get a soil test and follow the recommendations but also use composted manures as mulch applied in the late fall or early winter around the plant. Do not cover the crown of the plant. This can lead to promoting rots because of trapped moisture.

Rhubarb is planted as a root or more technically, a rhizome. Space plants two to four feet apart. Healthy plants can mature to four feet across. Plant the roots with the crown bud one inch below the soil surface. The planting hole should be made large so that composted manure or leaves or compost can be mixed with the existing soil. Do not compress the soil over the crown bud. Water the soil and keep it moist for optimal growth.

## **PLANT SELECTION**

There are several kinds of rhubarb available. They are divided into red or pink stems or green stems. There is no difference in the sweetness. It is more a personal preference.

Red varieties include Canada Red, Crimson Red and Valentine. MacDonald has pink stems. A green variety is Green Victoria. Buy plants with name labels rather than just "rhubarb."

## **HARVEST**

Do not harvest stems the first year. Pick lightly the second year. Stems can be cut at the soil level or pulled individually. Be sure to remove leaves. The usual harvest season is May until September. Hot weather will slow plant growth. When plants initiate flower stems that appear in the middle of the plant in May or June, remove them immediately.