



Down On The Farm!

Michigan's Asparagus



Did you know that asparagus is a member of the lily family and it can grow as quickly as ten inches in one day? Our State of Michigan ranks third in the nation for asparagus production. Ahead of us is California and Washington. Michigan produces up to 25 million pounds each year which is about 11,000 acres. The annual value of the asparagus crop is estimated at \$15,000,000!

Asparagus has no fat or cholesterol and is low in sodium. It is also a good source of potassium, fiber, vitamin B6, vitamins A and C and thiamin. In other words, asparagus is good for you!

Asparagus spears grow from a crown that is planted about a foot deep in sandy soils. Each of these crowns will send spears up for about 6-7 weeks during the spring and early summer. The temperature outdoors will determine how much time there is between each picking. In the early season, there may be 4 to 5 days between pickings and as the temperature gets warmer, it may have to be picked every 24 hours.

After the asparagus is harvested, the spears grow into ferns which produce red berries and the food and nutrients necessary for a healthy crop next season.

Asparagus plantings are not usually harvested for the first three years after the crowns are planted. This allows the crown to develop a strong root system. A well cared for asparagus planting will generally produce for about 15 years without being re-planted.



Try This Asparagus Recipe!

(Only make with parental supervision.)

Chicken & Asparagus With Penne Pasta

Ingredients:

- 1 pound chicken breast tenderloins
- 1 pinch garlic salt, or to taste
- 1 pinch seasoned salt, or to taste
- 1 pound uncooked penne pasta
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 pound fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut crosswise into thirds
- 1 pinch garlic salt, or to taste

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Cover a baking sheet with aluminum foil. Spread the chicken breast tenderloins on the baking sheet. Sprinkle them with garlic salt and seasoned salt. Bake chicken in preheated oven until it is no longer pink in the center and the juices run clear, about 15 minutes. Set aside. When cool enough to handle, cut the tenderloins into bite sized pieces. Fill a large pot with lightly salted water, bring to a boil and stir in penne. Cook pasta at a boil, stirring occasionally, until penne are cooked through but still slightly firm - about 11 minutes, drain them. Transfer penne back to cooking pot and stir in butter and Parmesan cheese until pasta is coated. Heat olive oil in skillet over medium heat and place asparagus into the hot oil and sprinkle with garlic salt. Cook and stir until asparagus are tender, about 7 minutes. Transfer penne pasta into a large serving bowl and top with asparagus and chicken tenderloin pieces. Lightly mix asparagus and chicken into the pasta and serve.