

Lemon Dijon Asparagus Salad

Catherine Brown, Plant-based Chef & Culinary Nutritionist at A Seat at My Table



I adore asparagus, especially when I can eat it young and as close after harvest as possible. This is when it is most tender and sweet. According to Harold McGee, world-renowned authority on the chemistry of foods and cooking and author of *On Food and Cooking The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*, "Once harvested, the actively growing shoot continues to consume its sugars, and does so more rapidly than any other common vegetable. Its flavor flattens out; it loses its juiciness, and it becomes increasingly fibrous from the base up". Good ol' McGee also gives us a way to slow this process down. More on that in a minute.

Asparagus does have one rather unpleasant side-effect - it makes your urine... well, distinctively smelly! I decided to dig a little to find out why. Science journalist, [Joseph Stromberg](#), wrote a great article for the Smithsonian that you can read [here](#).

In a nutshell, asparagus spears contain asparagusic acid (go figure!) which breaks down into sulfur-containing compounds during digestion. These sulfur-containing compounds transport a strong, and often unpleasant, scent (skunk spray is in the same family). To make matters worse, these compounds are also capable of vaporizing at room temperature - taking the fast lane straight up your nose. This effect can happen in as little as 20-30 minutes after eating.

A small number of people don't produce this smell at all. To date, research has not been able to identify a clear reason why. However, the majority of people who don't *notice* an odd odor are not in psychological denial, but rather they likely do not possess the *gene* necessary to perceive this particular scent. This specific gene discovery was ferreted out in 2010 by the genetic sequencing company, [23andMe](#). You can read about their findings [here](#).

So it's possible that you could be among the lucky few who can eat asparagus unhindered by smelly after-effects or that you just can't smell your own stink. Whichever the case, don't let this inconvenience deter you from eating this delicious vegetable.

Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamins A and K, and a good source of vitamin C, folate, thiamin, riboflavin, iron, copper, and manganese. See the full nutrient report [here](#).

Here's what McGee says about mitigating moisture and sugar losses from harvested asparagus: Soak the spears in a solution of sugar and water, 1-2 tsp of sugar per half cup of water. I recommend doing this as soon as you bring the asparagus home and at least 30 minutes before you plan to eat the asparagus. I found 1 tsp of sugar dissolved in one cup of water to be plenty.

Now let's get crackin' on this delicious salad, shall we?

Total Time: 12 minutes Prep Time: 8 minutes Cook Time: 3-4 minutes

For 4 salads you will need:

- ~ 8 cups of baby spinach with arugula or your favorite spring salad mix
- ~ 2 small bunches of young asparagus
- ~ Lemon slice for garnish (optional)

For the vinaigrette, you will need:

- ~ Juice of 2 large lemons
- ~ Plus enough white wine vinegar to make 1/3 cup
- ~ 2/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO)
- ~ 2 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- ~ If you LOVE lemon, add the zest of one of those lemons too!
- ~ 1 tsp salt
- ~ 1/2 tsp cracked black pepper

~ 1 Tbsp fresh lemon thyme or lemon basil (optional)

Alternatively, this salad can be dressed with any of these oil and sugar-free dressings:

~ [Lemony Garlic Dressing](#)

~ [Ginger Orange Dressing](#)

~ [Creamy Lemon Basil Dressing](#)

The Process:

1. Snap each asparagus stalk to separate the tender portion from the more fibrous portion. Do this by holding each stalk horizontally and, using both hands, bend the stalk until it snaps. This is one of the cool attributes of asparagus - each stalk may have a different point at which the stalk begins to become tough. Bending them until they snap offers the perfect separation. Alternatively, you can snap just one stalk and use that measurement as your guide for cutting all the rest. The thicker ends can be saved for making asparagus soup. Cut the tender tips into 1-2" pieces. Toss these in a colander and give them a quick rinse in cold water. Allow them to drain in the sink while you make the vinaigrette.
2. To make the vinaigrette, combine the lemon juice, zest (if using), vinegar, and Dijon mustard in a medium bowl. Whisk to combine. While still whisking, slowly drizzle in the EVOO until fully incorporated. The vinaigrette should be slightly thicker now. Add the salt, pepper and herbs (if using). Whisk until fully combined. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.
3. Heat a large skillet over medium/high heat (I use cast iron because it provides even heat and adds a bit of extra iron to this dish). While skillet is heating, place greens in a bowl large enough to allow tossing. Drizzle with enough vinaigrette to evenly coat the greens, and give them a quick toss. Arrange the greens on 4 serving plates. **DO NOT overcook!**
4. Add 1 Tbsp EVOO to hot skillet, shake any excess water from asparagus, and add them to the skillet. The small bit of water still on the stalks might sputter in

Nutrition Facts	
Servings: 4	
Per Serving	% Daily Value*
Calories 142	
Total Fat 8.3g	11%
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 48mg	2%
Potassium 825mg	18%
Total Carb 12.5g	4%
Dietary Fiber 5.9g	21%
Sugars 5.2g	
Protein 6g	
Vitamin A 221% · Vitamin C 77%	
Calcium 8% · Iron 14%	
*Based on a 2,000 calorie diet	
Recipe analyzed by verywell	

the oil, so take care. The water will help cook the spears, so don't bother to dry them. Cook for 3-4 minutes until bright green and tender crisp.

5. Immediately divide between the four plates. Drizzle the asparagus with additional vinaigrette, if desired. Enjoy!

Nutrition information is for 2 cups of baby spinach greens, 1 Tbsp of vinaigrette and 3/4 cup (or 10 snapped stalks) of asparagus.

NOTE: The vitamin C in the lemon juice (and zest if used) will help increase the bioavailability of the iron contained in the spinach, allowing more to be absorbed. A navel orange can have as much as 3x the vitamin C content as a lemon. Swap out the lemon juice for navel orange juice in the vinaigrette for an interesting twist. You may need to add a bit more vinegar to maintain the right acidity level.

When you make this, be sure to take a photo and tag me [#chefcatherinebrown](#). I love seeing what you make!