

theproducelady.org

MARCH 2011 E-NEWS

THE SEASON OF COMMUNITY

Spring is almost here; I can feel it! Make this the season you get involved with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In a CSA program, farmers establish a guaranteed market at the beginning of the season, while consumers enjoy a convenient assortment of fresh fruits and vegetables provided regularly. For more details on CSAs, read "CSA All the Way" on The Produce Lady Blog at theproducelady.wordpress.com.

THE PRODUCE BASKET

Asparagus Signals the Start of Spring



One of the first – and most treasured – delicacies of spring is fresh asparagus. Although not a traditional Southern food, the revival of culinary sophistication and healthy eating in North Carolina, prompted in part by the local foods movement, ensures asparagus its place on the table.

What to look for when buying asparagus

Some folks feel that there are two ways to get asparagus: a can or a chef. But you can find these tender beauties in many N.C. farmers markets during the spring months.

- Size and color aren't indicators of tenderness; spear tips are the best gauge of asparagus quality.
- As long as the tips of the spears are tight and not opened (purplish color is fine), the spears will be tender.
- Thick spears do not indicate toughness; thick spears can be just as tender as thin spears.
- Keep an eye open for asparagus that may be purple or white when shopping the market; these specialty varieties are just as delicious but often cost more.



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The Produce Lady newsletter
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WHAT'S IN SEASON?

Arugula, Beets, Carrots, Green Onions,
Leafy Greens, Peanuts,
Sweet Potatoes, Swiss Chard

KEEP IT FRESH

To store asparagus:

- Stand fresh stalks in an inch of water (or wrap the cut ends in wet paper towels).
- Refrigerate until time to prepare.
- Asparagus will keep for a week to 10 days with little loss of quality.

How to cook asparagus

Before preparing, gently rinse the asparagus in a large bowl to remove any soil. Break off the tougher part of the stem near the bottom where it snaps naturally. Although asparagus is usually cooked, it can be eaten raw with a dip or as part of a salad or vegetable tray. One pound of chopped asparagus yields about three cups, so make sure to buy enough.

This versatile vegetable is good grilled or roasted until lightly browned; steamed or boiled in a small amount of water just until crisp tender; and even microwaved in a covered dish with water for three to five minutes. To stir fry asparagus, cut the stems diagonally into one-inch pieces, leaving the tips whole, and cook with a couple tablespoons of olive oil for three to five minutes. Add other seasonal vegetables, like snap peas and carrots, to make a delicious vegetable medley.



Visit "Growing Small Farms" to find more N.C. agricultural resources.
www.growingsmallfarms.org

SHORT, SCRUMPTIOUS SEASON

N.C. asparagus is generally available March through June, with peak season in April and May. Some growers may offer asparagus during other times, but the local season is typically short and sweet.



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GOOD TASTE

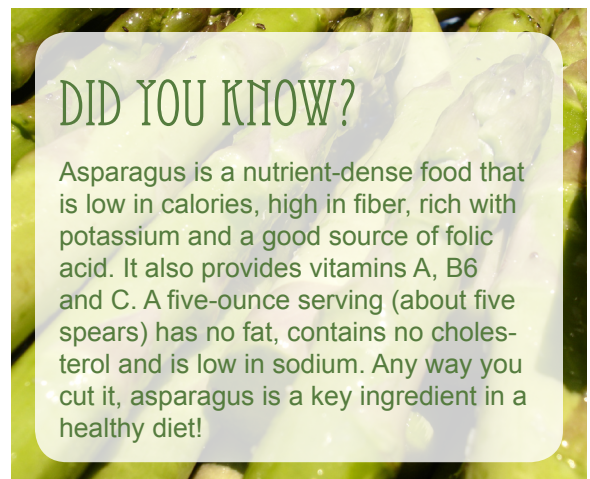
ROASTED ASPARAGUS

1 lb. asparagus
2 tbsp. olive oil
1 cup crumbled blue cheese, Parmesan or other cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a large bowl, toss the asparagus and olive oil. Pour asparagus and oil into a nonstick pan and top with cheese. Bake 15 to 20 minutes. Serves 4.



Print recipe card



DID YOU KNOW?

Asparagus is a nutrient-dense food that is low in calories, high in fiber, rich with potassium and a good source of folic acid. It also provides vitamins A, B6 and C. A five-ounce serving (about five spears) has no fat, contains no cholesterol and is low in sodium. Any way you cut it, asparagus is a key ingredient in a healthy diet!

