

ASPARAGUS AND RHUBARB



Robert G. Askew Neal S. Holland
Extension Horticulturist Agricultural Experiment Station

STATE UNIVERSITY

APR 8 1968

LIBRARY

**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA 58102**

S
544-3
N9
ASX
no. 61

ASPARAGUS AND RHUBARB

ASPARAGUS is the earliest vegetable you can harvest from your garden in the spring.

The young, tender shoots of asparagus usually reach cutting size about the second week in May. The average cutting date at Fargo for the past several years has been about May 12. These shoots may be cut every other day if temperature and moisture conditions are favorable.

VARIETIES

Mary Washington

SOIL AND SITE

Asparagus can be grown on most any type of soil that is well drained. Site preparation should be started a year or more in advance of planting crowns. If little or no barnyard manure is available, a heavy green manure crop (soybeans or sweet clover) should be plowed down the preceding year to add as much organic matter as possible. Asparagus responds to liberal application of fertilizer. It can be applied as a top-dressing.

Recommendations to fit all conditions are difficult to make. The appearance of the plants

has to be a guide, keeping in mind that satisfactory top growth in one season is the best assurance for a good yield the following season.

See Circular A-294 "Fertilizers for Lawn and Garden" for general rates of application.

PLANTS OR SEEDS

Asparagus may be started from seed, however, if only a few plants are needed for the home garden, it is usually best to purchase the crowns from a seedsman or nurseryman.

PLANTING

Plant the year-old plants in holes or a trench 5 to 6 inches deep in rows 4-5 feet apart. Space crowns 18 inches in the row.

As the shoots grow, fill the soil into the trench until finally the bed is level. With the crowns buried 5 to 6 inches deep, they are beyond danger of injury from the harrow or cultivator.

REQUIRES LITTLE CARE

Established beds require little care and will produce for 35 to 40 years, if attention is given to proper culture and care.

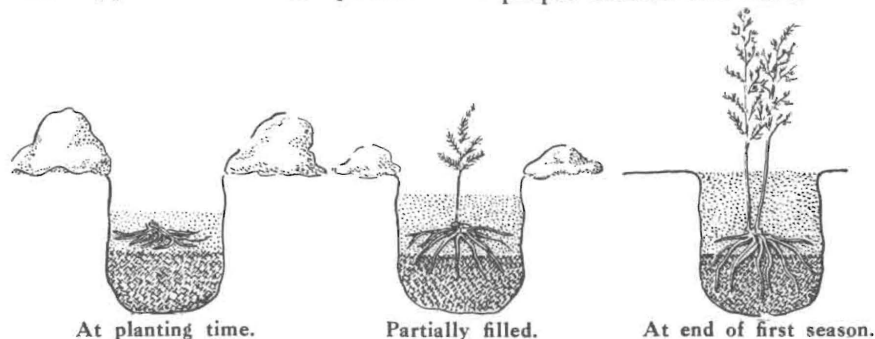


Fig. 1. Asparagus trench.

The annual yield on a 35-year old asparagus bed at NDSU Experiment Station averaged about 1½ tons per acre.

Weed control is necessary for good yielding asparagus. Many old asparagus beds have become overrun with quackgrass or other weeds. Chemical weed control has been very successful in asparagus. Follow instructions on the label for herbicide use.

BEGIN CUTTING THIRD YEAR

No shoots should be cut from the bed the first and second years the bed is being established. The cutting season should be short the third season, but on following years cutting may begin when the first shoots appear and continue for about 6 weeks, or not later than July 4. At this time the cutting should cease, to let the tops develop and produce leaves. Food is manufactured in the leaves and then stored in the roots to produce shoots the following spring.

The shoots are best cut when 6 to 8 inches high. Push the knife into the soil close to the shoot, cutting it 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface.

ALLOW TOPS TO STAND

Allow the tops to stand over winter, to catch and hold much snow. This serves to prevent deep freezing and sudden changes in soil temperature. The added moisture provided by this melting snow is also important to the crop of shoots produced the following spring. Remove the dead tops in the spring.

RHUBARB

Fresh rhubarb sauce or pie is a delightful substitute for fresh fruit in late spring or early summer when fruits are not yet in season. Rhubarb is easy to grow and will stand considerable neglect and still be there the following spring. Two to three rhubarb plants are adequate for the average family.

The leaves are not edible, either raw or cooked. Poisoning has been reported from eating the leaf blades of this plant.

SOILS

Deep, fertile loams, well-supplied with organic matter, are best suited for rhubarb growing. Well-

rotted manure benefits most rhubarb beds. Yields will be increased with clean cultivation and added fertility.

DIVIDE PLANTS TO RESET

Rhubarb is usually propagated by divisions of crowns formed during previous seasons. Crowns are divided in late fall or early spring. Take care to leave as much root as possible with each eye or bud. Plants from such crown divisions are preferred to plants raised from seed. Plants grown from seed seldom yield many plants equal to the mother plants.

If more than one row is planted, rows should be 5 feet apart with plants 3 to 4 feet apart in the row. Set crowns about 4 inches deep. In the average garden, rhubarb is usually planted at one side of the garden where it will not be disturbed by the plow. At the end of the asparagus row is a good location.

RESET EVERY FOURTH YEAR

Divide and reset plants about every fourth year to keep the bed in vigorous condition. Use a sharp spade or shovel to divide the crown, leaving 3 or 4 buds undisturbed in the old location. Portions removed may be used to enlarge the bed.

Do this renewal work in the fall or early spring. Plants not divided in this manner become large and the stalks become more numerous than is desirable. Remove seed stalks. They reduce the yield and vitality of the plant.

Rhubarb may be forced in the basement during winter months, if vigorous plants are taken from the ground after the crowns have been frozen thoroughly in the fall.

Bury the crowns in a box of earth in the basement, either in total darkness or diffused light. Water once a week. Usually about two crops of stalks will be produced. Leaf blades do not develop on these forced stalks. Crowns so used are worthless after they have produced a crop.

USE RECOMMENDED VARIETIES

Recommended rhubarb varieties for North Dakota are: Valentine, Ruby, McDonald, Canadian Red, and Sunrise. Valentine, McDonald, and Canadian Red, varieties from Canada, are preferred. They require less sugar than the old common varieties.