

Asparagus

One of the earliest and most celebrated of spring vegetables, asparagus pokes its green crowns out of the ground several weeks before most farms begin delivering their CSA shares. Even if your CSA doesn't distribute asparagus, we're including it here because of its springtime availability at farmers markets and perhaps in your own garden. Asparagus can be green to purple-green in color. European white asparagus, which is blanched underground until totally white, is esteemed for its delicate flavor and tender texture.

A Farm Friend

Here in Mexico you can buy really cheap tin and enamel narrow pots with steamer inserts that are designed especially for steaming asparagus. This in a country where everything but everything else gets cooked in pig fat on the comal.

Asparagus and White Bean Salad with Feta and Lemon Dressing

Served with crusty bread, this salad makes a terrific meal. White beans provide a delectable hearty-tenderness, without overwhelming the delicate asparagus. Tangy feta, zesty lemon, and a touch of mint give this salad a bright and refreshing flavor. *Friend of the Farm.*

Serves 4

- 1 pound asparagus, cut on an angle in 1-inch pieces (about 3 cups)
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh mint
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup cooked or canned white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced radishes
- 2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions

1. Place the asparagus in a steamer basket set over 1 1/2 inches boiling water, and cover. Steam until the spears are tender-firm, 4 to 7 minutes depending on thickness. Drain and place in an ice water bath (or under cold, running water) for a moment to stop the cooking.
2. Put the olive oil, lemon juice, fresh mint, lemon zest, salt, and pepper in a small bowl and whisk until well combined. Drain asparagus.
3. Combine the beans, feta, radishes, and scallions in a large bowl. Add the asparagus pieces. Pour on the dressing and gently toss. Serve at room temperature or chilled.



Storage

Trim the base of the stalks and place them upright in a jar filled with an inch of water. Or, wrap the cut ends of the stalks in a moist paper towel or damp tea towel, cover the bundle loosely in plastic, and put it in the refrigerator. Refrigerate asparagus for up to two weeks.

Handling

To eat it raw, peel the stems with a sharp knife instead of lopping off the tough base of the stalks. Start peeling at the base of the stalk, making your cut more shallow as you go upward. Stop peeling when you are a few inches from the crown.

Steamed Asparagus with Balsamic Butter and Pine Nuts

Perhaps the best way to honor the delectable simplicity of tender-crisp, just-steamed asparagus spears is to prepare them with a light touch. In this recipe a touch of butter makes the bright green spears glisten, a sprinkling of tangy-sweet balsamic vinegar brings out their sweetness, and a scattering of crispy nuts complements their unique silky-firm texture. This is elegant—and a cinch to prepare. *Friend of the Farm.*

Serves 3 to 4

- 1 1/2 tablespoons pine nuts or slivered almonds
- 1 pound asparagus, tough ends peeled or snapped off
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
- salt
- freshly ground black pepper

1. Place a heavy skillet over medium heat. Add the pine nuts or slivered almonds. Toast the nuts on the dry skillet, stirring constantly, until they are lightly browned and begin to smell toasty, 3 to 5 minutes. (Be careful not to overtoast them, as they will burn very quickly once toasted.) Remove the skillet from heat and immediately transfer the nuts to a heatproof dish. Set the dish aside to let the nuts cool completely.
2. Place the asparagus in a steamer basket, set over 1 1/2 inches boiling water, and cover. Steam until the spears are tender-firm, 4 to 7 minutes depending on thickness. Remove spears from the water and arrange on individual plates.
3. Combine the melted butter and balsamic vinegar in a small bowl and whisk until well combined. Pour this mixture over the asparagus and sprinkle on the toasted nuts. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

Our Cook

When I arrived here at Angelic Organics in March, I served lots of storage roots when I started cooking. So when the first precious asparagus stalks graced the table, everyone appreciated the meal even more.

Excerpted from *Farmer John's Cookbook: The Real Dirt On Vegetables: Seasonal Recipes and Stories from a Community Farm* by Farmer John Peterson & Angelic Organics (Gibbs Smith, Publisher). Check with your local farm or bookstore for availability. Additional recipes, charts, individual copies of this book, and quantity discounts available at www.AngelicOrganics.com/cookbook.