



PACIFIC COAST
FARMERS' MARKET
ASSOCIATION

ASPARAGUS, THE "KING OF VEGETABLES"




Among the first seasonal spring vegetables to appear at the farmers' market are beautiful bundles of asparagus. The first green spears typically begin to pop out of the ground in late February and are harvested through May or June, depending on the weather. Asparagus takes about three years before it can produce spears but once established it grows quickly, sometimes several inches in a day under favorable conditions!

California is lucky enough to have micro-climates ideal for asparagus production. California asparagus is produced in several regions including the Central Valley, Central Coast, and the Stockton / Delta region. The state produces approximately 75% of the nation's fresh market asparagus.

The best part of spring asparagus is not just the delicious earthly flavor it has, but the ease with which it can be prepared. In fact, the emperor Caesar Augustus, a connoisseur of asparagus, would shout "*Velocius quam asparagi conquantur!*" or "Faster than cooking asparagus!" Steamed, roasted, grilled, sautéed, pickled, and baked are all methods to prepare and enjoy this savory vegetable.

Asparagus contains a nice sweetness at the moment of harvest. This rapidly begins to change into starch. In order to avoid this, we suggest you use those lovely sweet spears as soon after purchase as possible to get the best flavor. That is why it's best to purchase asparagus at your local farmers' market where farmers bring just-picked asparagus as soon after harvest as possible. Asparagus is also cut by hand to ensure quality. You won't find fresher flavor anywhere else – and it's locally-grown.

Select bright green asparagus with closed, compact, firm tips. If the tips are slightly wilted, freshen them up by soaking them in cold water. The fat spears are just as tender as the thin ones, so it's your choice which ones you like better. Tenderness relates to color—the

greener the better. Keep fresh asparagus moist and eat as soon as possible after purchase.

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