



Columbia Nursery

Growing Asparagus in Northwest Montana (Zones 3–5)

A Customer Guide from Columbia Nursery

Why Grow Asparagus?

Asparagus is one of the most rewarding vegetables for Montana gardeners. Once established, it provides delicious spears every spring for decades. It's a hardy perennial crop well-suited to USDA Zones 3–5 and is packed with vitamins, fiber, and antioxidants.

Choosing Your Asparagus

Select cold-hardy varieties for best success in Northwest Montana. Plan for about one dozen crowns per person in the household to ensure a full harvest.

Recommended varieties:

- Millennium: Extremely cold-hardy with high yields.
- Jersey Giant: Cold-tolerant, mostly male plants (fewer seeds, more spears).
- Purple Passion: Sweet, tender purple spears that turn green when cooked.
- Guelph Eclipse: Early production with excellent cold tolerance.

Site Selection & Preparation

Choose a spot that will remain undisturbed for many years. The edge of a garden bed often works well. Asparagus needs 4–6 hours of sun daily and prefers well-drained soil. It does not tolerate wet feet.

Prepare trenches 18 inches wide, 12 inches deep, and about 12 feet long for every dozen crowns. Space trenches 2 feet apart. Mix compost or aged manure half and half with soil from the trench.

Planting Asparagus Crowns

Purchase crowns in early spring when the soil can be worked. Buy crowns no more than a day or two before planting and soak them overnight in water to prevent drying out.

Place 6 inches of the improved soil in the trench bottom and water it well. Set crowns 12–18 inches apart, spreading the roots like a star. Cover with 2 inches of soil and water again.

As the shoots grow, fill in the trench gradually with the remaining soil, being careful not to bury the growing tips. If tips are 2 inches high, cover them with about 1.5 inches of soil. Check the bed every other day.

Care and Maintenance

- Keep the bed evenly moist, especially in the first two years.
- Use grass clippings (chemical-free), straw, or fine bark mulch to suppress weeds and conserve moisture.
- Asparagus is a heavy feeder. Each spring, before shoots emerge, add 2 inches of compost or aged manure.



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- Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer after harvest each year.
- Keep the bed weed-free to prevent competition.

Harvesting Asparagus

Do not harvest any spears the first year. The second spring, you may begin harvesting when spears are 5–8 inches long. Use a clean knife to cut spears at a 45° angle to the soil surface to avoid damaging nearby shoots. Harvest for only 4–6 weeks or until thin spears appear, signaling root exhaustion. In following years, harvest for up to 6–8 weeks each spring.

Fall and Winter Care

Allow the plants to grow into tall, feathery fronds all summer. After the first hard frost in fall, cut the ferns back to about 2 inches tall. Apply a protective layer of mulch, such as straw or pine needles, to protect the crowns over winter.

Troubleshooting Thin Spears

If your asparagus starts producing spindly spears, apply a heavy layer of compost and skip harvesting for a season to allow the bed to recover. A well-tended bed can produce for 12–20 years before needing to be replaced.

Visit Columbia Nursery

Stop by Columbia Nursery for high-quality asparagus crowns, planting supplies, and expert advice. We're here to help you grow a thriving asparagus bed that will reward you for years to come!