

Asparagus

Go Aussie Spears!



Contents



Introduction

3



Selecting, storing and preparing asparagus

4



Asparagus and Rocket Pesto

5



Asparagus Antipasto

6



Asparagus and Green Pea Soup with Cashews

7



Chicken and Asparagus Stir-Fry

8



Asparagus and Salmon Frittata

9



Asparagus Pasta with Spinach and Prosciutto

10



Spiced Coconut Chicken with Asparagus

11



Asparagus, Pumpkin and Tomato Risotto

12



BBQ Asparagus

13



Lamb and Asparagus Skewers

14



Chicken and Asparagus Koftas

15



Pesto Asparagus Roll-Ups

16



Asparagus Hummus

17



Spearheading Health with Asparagus

18



Versatile Aussie spears – even more recipe ideas

19



Stay in touch for more news, recipes and tips

20

Introduction

It seems we are not the only ones eagerly awaiting spring with its warm sunny days and refreshing spring rains. Did you know that asparagus plants have been lying dormant beneath the ground during winter, waiting to send forth their shoots? These shoots are the luscious spears we love so much. In ideal conditions asparagus spears can grow at the amazing rate of 1-2 cm per hour. Go Aussie spears we say!



There are so many delicious ways to enjoy asparagus from taste tempting starters and delicious soups to yummy stir-fries, pasta, risotto and frittata. Asparagus can also be whipped up into healthy snacks and packed into lunchboxes and picnic hampers. And that's not all - it's a good idea to have plenty of Aussie spears on hand whenever we fire up our BBQs to add freshness and flavour to Australia's favourite dining ritual.

As if being yummy wasn't enough, asparagus has abundant nutrition packed into every spear, including a range of B group vitamins, vitamin C and potassium. Asparagus also has a brilliant range of bioactive compounds, such as antioxidants like rutin and beta-carotene, which help keep us healthy, well into old age.

We hope the recipes and tips in this book help you to get the most out of Australian asparagus.

Wishing you a happy and healthy spring and summer with plenty of delicious eating,

Your growers from the Australian Asparagus Council



Selecting, storing and preparing asparagus

SEASONAL AVAILABILITY

Australian asparagus is available from September to March with more bountiful supplies during September, October and November.

SELECTING ASPARAGUS

- Look for firm, bright, smooth, spears of uniform size with closed, compact tips.
- When you snap fresh asparagus, it should be crisp, moist and juicy.

STORING ASPARAGUS

Did you know that freshly harvested asparagus is very similar to cut flowers? It needs to be kept in cool, humid conditions.

Here are two tried and true ways to keep asparagus fresher for longer:

1. Wrap it in a damp tea towel, pop in a plastic bag and store in the crisper compartment of the refrigerator.
2. Stand the fresh spears upright in a container with 1cm cold water, cover and store in the refrigerator.

PREPARING ASPARAGUS

- Simply snap off the woody ends with your forefinger and thumb.
- Alternatively, run a knife along the stalk until it meets less resistance, and then cut the end off at this point.
- Asparagus can be served both raw and cooked - try it fresh in salads and salsas as well as in an endless variety of cooked dishes.

Asparagus and Rocket Pesto

Whipped up from fresh asparagus this makes a delicious dip or a spread.

Makes: 1 1/2 cups

Cooking time: Nil

Ingredients

- 2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed
- 3 - 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 cups rocket leaves
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons grated parmesan, or cashew nuts

To serve:

Fresh vegetables such as scrubbed baby carrots and sliced Lebanese cucumbers, grissini sticks, fresh baguette or crackers

Method

1. Using a blender or food mill, process asparagus, garlic, rocket, olive oil, salt and pepper until you reach the desired consistency.
2. Add parmesan cheese (or cashew nuts) and process until thoroughly combined.
3. If using pesto straight away, transfer to a serving bowl. Serve with fresh vegetables accompanied by grissini sticks, sliced baguette or crackers
4. If not using pesto at once, store in an airtight container in refrigerator for 2-3 days.

TIPS

- Toss this pesto through freshly cooked pasta with a small amount of the water it was cooked in, and then top with parmesan.
- For a vegan version, use cashew nuts instead of parmesan.



Asparagus Antipasto

Prosciutto wrapped asparagus is a classic dish perfect for a light lunch or snack when family and friends drop in.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 1 minute

Ingredients

- 12 asparagus spears, woody ends removed
- 12 slices prosciutto
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1-2 garlic cloves, crushed
- Baby truss tomatoes
- Turkish bread, sliced
- 1 wedge of your favourite Brie
- 1 wedge of your favourite blue cheese

Method

1. Place asparagus in a large heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Allow to stand for 30-60 seconds. Remove asparagus and place in a separate large bowl of cold water for 1 minute to prevent further cooking. Drain asparagus and pat dry with paper towel.
2. Wrap each asparagus spear with a slice of prosciutto and arrange on a serving platter.
3. Combine oil and garlic. Brush baby truss tomatoes with 2 teaspoons of the mixture and grill or roast until skins are split.
4. Brush Turkish bread with the remaining garlic and olive oil mixture and grill on a char-grill plate or in a heavy based frying pan.
5. Arrange baby truss tomatoes, bread and cheese next to asparagus on a serving platter and serve at once.

TIP

- For a vegetarian dish, omit the prosciutto. To add flavour to the asparagus, drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil and sprinkle lightly with salt flakes and freshly ground pepper.



Asparagus and Green Pea Soup with Cashews

Bursting with veggie goodness, this yummy soup makes a nutritious light meal served with your favourite bread.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 15-20 minutes

Ingredients

2-3 teaspoons olive oil
1 large onion, chopped
2-3 garlic cloves, chopped
2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, chopped
2 cups vegetable stock
2 cups frozen green peas
1/2 cup roasted or raw cashews
Salt flakes and pepper to taste
Fresh herbs such as baby basil leaves to serve

Method

1. Heat a large saucepan over medium heat, add oil and stir-fry onion for 1 minute. Stir in garlic, reduce heat to low, cover and cook for 2 minutes.
2. Add asparagus and stir over heat for 1 minute. Stir in stock, cover and bring to the boil. Cook over low to medium heat for 2-3 minutes. Stir in peas and cashews and return to the boil. Reduce heat and cook until asparagus and peas are just tender and still bright green, 2-3 minutes.
3. Blend until smooth, reheat gently and season to taste. Serve with freshly ground pepper and fresh herbs.

TIPS

- For a thinner consistency add a little more vegetable stock when blending.
- Adding cashew nuts helps provide a lovely creamy texture without needing cream.
- For this recipe to be gluten free, avoid using stocks, sauces and condiments containing wheat. Take care to check ingredient labels on all products you use.



Chicken and Asparagus Stir-Fry



TIPS

- You can also use chicken stir-fry strips or replace the chicken with strips of beef or pork.
- For a vegetarian version replace the chicken with strips of marinated tofu.

A tasty one-dish meal the family will love.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 12-15 minutes

Ingredients

- 600g chicken breast fillets, cut into strips (see Tips)
- 500g fresh hokkien noodles
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 carrot, cut into sticks
- 1 red capsicum, cut into sticks
- 2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, sliced into 3
- 1-2 small fresh red chillies, sliced finely
- 2-3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons sweet chilli sauce
- 2 tablespoons oyster sauce
- 1/2 cup roasted cashews
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil (optional)

Method

1. Place noodles in a heatproof bowl, cover with boiling water and stand for 1 minute. Drain and separate noodles. Set aside.
2. Heat a wok over a medium to high heat, add 2 tablespoons of the oil and stir-fry chicken until cooked through, 5-7 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside.
3. Add remaining tablespoon of oil to wok and stir-fry carrot for 1-2 minutes. Add capsicum, asparagus, chillies and garlic and stir-fry for 2-3 minutes.
4. Add reserved chicken, sweet chilli sauce, oyster sauce and noodles and stir-fry for 1-2 minutes or until heated through.
5. Sprinkle with sesame oil (if using), scatter with roasted cashews and serve at once

Asparagus and Salmon Frittata

This frittata is delicious hot or cold so make plenty to enjoy leftovers for lunch the next day.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 35-40 minutes

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 300g salmon fillet
- 8 free range eggs
- 1 cup plain Greek yoghurt
- 1 tablespoon lemon thyme, finely chopped
- Salt and pepper
- 1 red capsicum, chopped
- 2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, sliced
- Additional yoghurt to serve (optional)

Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.
2. Heat an ovenproof frying pan over high heat. Add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and cook salmon fillet skin side down for 2 minutes to seal. Turn salmon over to lightly brown other side. Remove from pan, place on a plate and set aside in refrigerator to cool. Reserve pan to use later.
3. Crack eggs into a mixing bowl. Add yoghurt, thyme, salt and pepper and whisk until all ingredients are well combined.
4. Take cooled salmon from refrigerator, remove skin and break up flesh into small bite-size pieces. Combine capsicum and asparagus with egg mix. Carefully stir in chunks of salmon.
5. Heat the pan the salmon was cooked in and add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil. Pour frittata mixture into pan. Bake in preheated oven for 30-35 minutes or until cooked through.
6. Remove from oven and allow frittata to cool slightly before cutting. Serve accompanied with thick yoghurt.

TIPS

- Delicious served with a simple green salad with a lemon olive oil dressing.
- For a vegetarian version replace salmon with 125g feta broken into pieces or 125g grated cheese.

Asparagus Pasta with Spinach and Prosciutto

Spaghetti is a classic family favourite and this one is a particularly tasty spring special.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 20-25 minutes

Ingredients

1/2 cup pine nuts
1 tablespoon olive oil
4 slices prosciutto
1/2 bunch spring onions, chopped
1 teaspoon sliced red chillies
3 garlic cloves, chopped or crushed
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
Juice of 1 lemon
350g spaghetti
2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, sliced
1/2 cup grated parmesan
Additional parmesan to serve

Method

1. Bring 4 litres of water with 1/2 teaspoon salt to the boil in a large pot.
2. Meanwhile, heat a frying pan over low to medium heat. Add pine nuts and cook, shaking pan over heat until nuts are lightly toasted. Remove from pan and set aside.
3. Heat oil in pan and cook prosciutto until crispy. Remove from pan and set aside.
4. Add spring onions, chillies and garlic to pan and stir-fry 1 minute. Stir in mustard and lemon juice, then remove from heat and set aside.
5. Cook spaghetti in boiling water until almost tender. Add asparagus and return pasta to the boil. Cook until asparagus and spaghetti are just tender, 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat and strain pasta and asparagus through a colander. Quickly return pasta to pan.
6. Add spring onion mixture, spinach leaves and parmesan to pasta and stir to combine and reheat.
7. Break prosciutto into pieces. Serve pasta scattered with the pine nuts, prosciutto and extra parmesan.

TIPS

- You can replace the prosciutto with pancetta or ham.
- For a tasty vegetarian alternative, replace the prosciutto with haloumi cheese.

Spiced Coconut Chicken with Asparagus



This spicy dish is as yummy as it is colourful and the bonus is that it is quick and easy to make.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 15 minutes

Ingredients

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 large chicken breast fillets, sliced
1/2 onion, sliced
2 tablespoons Thai red curry paste
1 large red capsicum, sliced
2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, sliced into 3
1 bunch bok choy, sliced
115g packet baby corn
270ml can coconut milk
Steamed rice to serve

Method

1. Heat oil in a frying pan over medium to high heat and cook chicken strips until browned on both sides. Remove from pan and set aside.
2. Add onion, curry paste and capsicum to pan and stir-fry for 4 minutes.
3. Add asparagus, bok choy and baby corn to pan and toss well over heat.
4. Stir in browned chicken and coconut milk and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 4 minutes. Serve with steamed rice.

Asparagus, Pumpkin and Tomato Risotto

TIPS

- Make a double quantity so you have tasty leftovers to heat up the next day, or to make into [arancini](#).
- If planning to make arancini, cut asparagus into smaller slices.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons basil pesto for a punchier flavour.

A great way to include more delicious veggies in family meals.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 20-25 minutes

Ingredients

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 small onion, chopped finely
200-250g pumpkin, diced
2-3 garlic cloves, chopped finely or crushed
1-2 tomatoes, diced
1 1/4 cups Arborio rice
3 cups vegetable stock
2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, sliced
1/3 cup grated parmesan
Salt flakes and pepper to taste
Shaved parmesan and baby basil leaves to serve

Method

1. Bring stock to the boil in a saucepan. Meanwhile heat oil in a deep frying pan and stir-fry onion and pumpkin over medium to high heat for 1-2 minutes.
2. Add rice and cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring. Add garlic and tomatoes, stir in 1 cup stock and cook risotto over low heat, stirring occasionally, until stock is absorbed.
3. Stir in second cup of stock and continue cooking risotto until stock is absorbed.
4. Add third cup of stock and asparagus and continue cooking until rice is cooked and asparagus is tender.
5. Stir in grated parmesan, salt and pepper. Serve at once with shaved parmesan and baby basil leaves.

BBQ Asparagus

Throw Aussie spears on the BBQ for delectable summer eating. Such a good way to eat up our veggies!

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 4-5 minutes

Ingredients

3 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed

1-2 tablespoons olive oil

1-2 garlic cloves, chopped or crushed (optional)

Salt flakes and pepper

Method

1. Place asparagus in a large bowl. Combine olive oil with garlic (if using) and add to asparagus. Using your hands, toss asparagus to coat with olive oil mixture. Alternatively, brush mixture over asparagus using a pastry brush.
2. Heat a BBQ or char-grill and cook asparagus until just tender, 4-5 minutes, turning over after 2 minutes.
3. Remove from the heat immediately and arrange on a serving platter or on individual serving plates.
4. Sprinkle with salt flakes and pepper and serve at once.

TIPS

- Serve with lemon halves for squeezing over asparagus.
- For a richer 'dressing' drizzle asparagus with lemon pressed olive oil.
- Also delicious topped with shaved parmesan and served with barbecued truss tomatoes.



Lamb and Asparagus Skewers

TIPS

- Throw some whole asparagus spears on the BBQ at the same time.
- You can replace the lamb with beef, pork or chicken.
- For a vegetarian option, replace the lamb with cubes of haloumi cheese or marinated tofu.



A yummy way to cook your meat and veggies all at once.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 8-10 minutes

Ingredients

- 2 x 400g lamb backstraps, trimmed
- 12 baby button mushrooms
- 12 baby truss (or cherry) tomatoes
- 8 thick asparagus spears, woody ends removed
- 8 bamboo skewers soaked in water 30 minutes

Lemon and Basil Marinade:

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Black pepper

Method

1. Cut lamb lengthways down the middle and then into 2-3cm slices. Transfer to non-metallic storage container. Combine marinade ingredients, pour over lamb and toss to combine. Cover and store in refrigerator for up to one day.
2. Cut asparagus into 3cm pieces. When needed, thread asparagus, lamb, mushrooms and tomatoes alternately on skewers.
3. Heat BBQ, grill or large heavy based frying pan over medium to high heat and cook skewers for 5 minutes each side, or to your liking.

Chicken and Asparagus Koftas

A dish with a difference for your next BBQ. Chopped asparagus adds a lovely herbaceous flavour to the koftas. We've also popped some into the Tzatziki dip to add even more spring freshness to this dish.

Makes: 8-10

Cooking time: 8 minutes

Ingredients

Koftas:

8-10 long sprigs of fresh rosemary or bamboo skewers
2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed, chopped
650g minced chicken
1/2 red onion, finely diced
1/2 bunch coriander leaves and stalks, chopped
1/2 teaspoon ground all spice
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
Salt and pepper
Olive oil for cooking
Sweet chilli sauce to serve (optional)

Asparagus Tzatziki:

250ml Greek yoghurt
1/2 bunch asparagus, woody ends removed, chopped finely
1/2 -1 Lebanese cucumber, seeds removed, grated or chopped finely
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1 chilli, seed removed and diced finely
Lemon juice to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

1. To make koftas, combine all ingredients in large mixing bowl. Wash your hands and, using moist hands, take a small handful of the mixture and mould it around skewers. Transfer skewers to a plate, cover and set aside in refrigerator for 30 minutes if time permits.
2. Preheat a grill-plate, large heavy based frying pan or BBQ. Add a little olive oil and cook koftas, carefully turning them every 2 minutes until nicely browned and cooked through, about 8 minutes.
3. To prepare Asparagus Tzatziki, combine all ingredients and transfer to a serving bowl. If not serving at once, store in refrigerator for 2-3 days.
4. Serve koftas with tzatziki alongside.

TIP

- Stems of rosemary make interesting skewers that infuse flavour into the food.
- Alternatively, use stainless steel or bamboo skewers. If using bamboo skewers, soak in water for 30 minutes before using.

Pesto Asparagus Roll-Ups

Roll up, roll up and try these yummy wraps. They are perfect for lunchboxes or picnics. At home, eat them just as they are or pop them into a sandwich press to make hot rollers! Use either of the pesto sauces below.

Serves: 4

Cooking time: 4-5 minutes

Ingredients

Asparagus and Rocket Pesto:

2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed
3-4 garlic cloves, chopped
2 cups rocket leaves
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
2-3 tablespoons grated parmesan or roasted cashews

Semi-Dried Tomato Pesto:

2 cups semi-dried tomatoes, drained
3 garlic cloves, chopped
1-2 red chillies, chopped
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Additional 2 bunches asparagus, woody ends removed
6 tortillas, roti or mountain bread
1/2 cup grated tasty cheese or crumbled feta

Method

1. To prepare either pesto, use a blender or food mill to process all ingredients to desired consistency, and then set aside.
2. BBQ, grill or steam additional asparagus until just tender, 4-5 minutes.
3. Spread tortillas thickly with pesto and top with cheese. Arrange 2-3 asparagus spears across each tortilla. Roll up firmly and serve whole, halved or sliced.



Asparagus Hummus

TIP

- For extra spear power, serve with [Asparagus Felafels](#).

Looking for a quick and healthy starter or snack? Asparagus adds a lovely fresh flavour to this ever-popular dip.

Makes: 1 1/2 cups

Cooking time: Nil

Ingredients

1 bunch asparagus, woody ends removed
1 cup cooked or canned drained chick peas
2-3 garlic cloves, chopped
1/3 teaspoon ground cumin
Juice of 1 large lemon
2-3 tablespoons tahini
Good pinch of salt flakes
Freshly ground pepper
Few drops of Tabasco sauce

To serve:

Freshly cooked felafels (see Tip)
Pita pocket bread
Shredded lettuce
Additional 1-2 bunches asparagus spears, blanched and sliced

Method

1. Chop asparagus and place in a food mill or processor. Add chick peas, garlic, cumin, lemon juice, tahini, salt, pepper and Tabasco and blend until smooth.
2. If serving hummus straight away, transfer to a serving bowl. Serve with warmed pita pocket bread, shredded lettuce, sliced cherry tomatoes and blanched, sliced asparagus.
3. If not using hummus at once, store in an airtight container in refrigerator for 2-3 days.

Spearheading Health with Asparagus

Asparagus is not only delicious, versatile and quick and easy to cook, it also has abundant nutrition packed into every spear.

DID YOU KNOW?

- 1 Asparagus is low in kilojoules, and contains no fat or cholesterol, whilst providing fibre. That makes it a must for any diet, including a weight loss diet.
- 2 Asparagus provides the essential B group vitamins thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, B6 and biotin.
- 3 Asparagus is a great source of folate. One serve provides over 20% of our daily needs. Folate is important for expectant mothers for the healthy development of the baby during pregnancy.
- 4 It's not only fruit that gives us vitamin C. One serve of asparagus provides about 25% of our daily needs of vitamin C.
- 5 Asparagus has a brilliant range of bioactive compounds, such as antioxidants like rutin and beta-carotene, which help keep us healthy, well into old age.
- 6 Asparagus has potassium and the compound nicotianamine, which helps to keep our blood pressure within an optimal healthy range.



Versatile Aussie spears – even more recipe ideas

We hope you enjoy trying these recipes too!



Spring Vegetable Soup

Soup is for all seasons. What better ingredient in Spring Vegetable Soup than Aussie spears?



Asparagus Toasties

Cheese toasties make a delicious and warming light lunch or snack. Team up with a bowl of yummy soup and you have a satisfying, healthy dinner.



Asparagus with Spanish Eggs and Chorizo

Tasty little pots of goodness to start the day or serve for a light meal with warmed tortilla.



BBQ Asparagus Salad

A quick and easy way to add more veggies to your next BBQ.



Asparagus Nicoise Salad Roll

A trumped up 'Springtime Salad Roll' pairing luscious local asparagus with tuna and eggs. Perfect for the lunchbox, weekend lunch or picnic hamper.



Asparagus Mayo with Goujons and Spears

Fish and spears instead of fish and chips! Enjoy dipping crunchy crumbed fish and luscious asparagus spears into this yummy mayo.



Asparagus Stir-fry with Marinated Asian Lamb

Get the lamb marinating while you prepare the veggies and cook the rice. Once the wok's fired up you're only minutes away from saying, "Dinner's ready!"

Stay in touch for more news, recipes and tips

Check out our website asparagus.com.au



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