Farmers’ Market Favorites: Asparagus

Nutrition Information
Asparagus is a wonderful springtime vegetable perfected by Mother Nature as a great source of Vitamin C, Vitamin B-6, folic acid and fiber. In addition asparagus is low in calories, only 22 calories per cooked half cup and is naturally fat and cholesterol free. Looking for some variety in meal planning - check out the asparagus recipes on back.

Selection
- Select stalks that are green and tender.
- Tips should be well formed and tightly closed.
- The spears should be a rich green color. For even cooking, select spears that are similar in diameter.
- One pound contains approximately 16 to 20 stalks, which is enough for 3 to 4 servings.

Storage
- To help keep asparagus fresh, cut a thin slice from the base of each stalk.
- Wrap a moist paper towel around the bottom of the stalks before refrigerating.
- Store in the refrigerator crisper or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Preparation
- Snap off tough ends by bending the stalk gently until it breaks.
- Wash spears thoroughly in warm water.
- Remove scales from stalks with a vegetable peeler or knife.
- To boil asparagus, add spears to boiling water and simmer gently for 3 to 5 minutes or until crisp tender.
- To steam asparagus, stand spears upright with tips extending out of the water, and then steam for 5 to 8 minutes.
- In a microwave, cooking asparagus is a snap. Place spears in a microwave safe dish with ¼ cup water. Cover and microwave on High for 2 to 3 minutes.
- To stir-fry cut the spears diagonally into 1 to 2-inch pieces. Add to a small amount of oil. Add seasonings such as garlic or ginger and cook over medium heat for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring frequently.

Freezing
- Wash and trim the stalks.
- Blanch small spears for 2 minutes, medium spears for 3 minutes and large spears for 4 minutes.
- Remove spears from boiling water and plunge into ice water for several minutes to stop the cooking process.
- When spears are cool, pack in freezer containers.

Asparagus Recipes

Grilled Asparagus
1 bunch asparagus
2 Tbsp. Olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Trim bottoms of asparagus. Lightly brush spears with olive oil. Grill over medium heat (or under broiler) turning once for 3 minutes or to desired tenderness.

Grilling intensifies the flavor of asparagus. Serve up a platter of tasty grilled asparagus as an appetizer with cured meats. Or serve along side your favorite entrée.
Gingered Asparagus
1 pound fresh asparagus
Cooking spray
2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
2 teaspoons sesame seeds, toasted
1 teaspoon minced gingerroot
Dash of pepper

1. Snap off tough ends off asparagus. Cut spears into 2-inch pieces.
2. Coat a large nonstick skillet with cooking spray.
3. Place over medium-low heat until hot. Add asparagus, soy sauce, sesame seeds, ginger root and pepper. Cook, stirring constantly for 5 minutes.
4. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings. (Per serving: 32 calories; 1.1 grams fat)

Asparagus Vinaigrette
1 ½ pounds fresh asparagus
1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
1 tablespoon minced fresh chives

1. Snap the tough end off asparagus. Steam for 5 to 8 minutes, until asparagus is crisp tender.
2. Plunge in cold water to stop cooking process. Set aside.
3. Combine remaining ingredients to make vinaigrette. Pour over asparagus and serve.

Yield: 6 ½-cup servings. (Per serving: 60 calories; 5 grams fat)

Asparagus Guacamole
1 pound fresh asparagus
2 tsp. Lime juice
1 clove garlic, minced
¼ tsp. Onion powder
¼ tsp. Ground cumin
2 tbsp. Chopped green chili peppers (canned or fresh)
Dash salt/white pepper
1 small tomato, chopped and seeded

Cook asparagus. Drain well and place in blender. Add all ingredients except tomato. Blend until smooth. Stir in chopped tomato. Chill before serving with tortilla chips or as a vegetable dip.

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