Growing asparagus

Source: Jamie Dockery, UK extension horticulture agent

 Asparagus is a wonderful vegetable, it can be prepared in so many different ways, it is full of nutrients, and by the end of April, there should plenty of asparagus available. It is an easy crop to grow and is very popular, but different than most vegetables because it is a perennial.

 If done correctly, one planting of asparagus crowns can keep you in asparagus for 20 to 25 years. Asparagus produces something other than the little spear you see in the grocery store. That spear is actually the sprout; it’s the tip. After you stop harvesting, you have to let it grow to a ferny, shrub-like plant, six-to-eight feet in height, to make more food for the sprouts you will harvest next year.

 It is easy to grow in the home garden and doesn’t have a tremendous amount of disease or insect pressure. Asparagus is a slow reward because when you plant it, you are generally not going to get any that first season; it will produce spears, but you should not cut them. There will be only minimal production the second season and by year three, you will have a six-to-eight week harvest season.

 When it comes to selecting asparagus, you should look for all-male varieties. Asparagus is seedling propagated, even in an all-male variety, there will be a few female plants. The ratio is less if they don’t spend energy producing flowers and little berries, and that means more asparagus for you.

 As far as varieties are concerned, *Purple Passion* is an older variety. *Purple Pacifica* has less lignin, is less fibrous, making it more crispy and crunchy, but it will turn green when you cook it. The sugar content is higher and it is great broken up in salads.

 You should plant your asparagus six-to-eight inches deep and cover it as it grows. Asparagus is pretty much the first vegetable you can get out of the garden each season and is beloved because of the flavor. It tastes so much better when it is fresh-picked and hasn’t been on a truck for weeks.

 Contact (YOUR COUNTY) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service for information on growing asparagus.

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