After-Harvest Care of Asparagus

Asparagus can grow and thrive in a vegetable garden for many years, if it receives good care following harvest. Towards the end of June stop harvesting, allowing the asparagus fronds to grow throughout the remainder of the season.

Fertilization
Each year after the final harvest, fertilize your asparagus planting. If your soil tests high in phosphorus, use a low phosphorus fertilizer such as 32-3-10 or 25-3-12 or a no-phosphorus fertilizer such as 30-0-10 or 24-0-15. The same is true for potassium. If your soil tests high, no additional potassium is needed.

Apply 50 lb Nitrogen per acre by side-dressing the rows and lightly tilling it in. The equivalent amount for smaller plantings is:
- 1.2 lb N/1,000 sq. ft.
- 1.2 lb N/100 sq. ft.

Well-rotted manure can be used in place of commercial fertilizer. Apply approximately 50 lb/100 sq. ft.

Cultural Control
Use 3–4 inches of mulch in conjunction with hoeing or tilling. Organic mulch, such as wood chips, grass clippings, compost or clean straw, prevents germination of new weeds, minimizes soil temperature fluctuations in summer and helps preserve soil moisture.

Herbicides
A preemergent herbicide should have been applied in late April to kill germinating seeds of summer annual weeds, like crabgrass, spurge and oxalis. In late June, apply a second preemergent herbicide to prevent germination of additional summer annual weeds. Reapply every 4–6 weeks at labeled rates throughout the summer, but be careful not to apply it to areas where you will be planting additional seeded crops.

No Salt
Do not use salt! An old recommendation for asparagus weed control involved the application of salt, by pouring the salty water from an ice cream maker on the asparagus patch. This provided some weed control because asparagus is a poor competitor with weeds, however, there are several techniques that can be used to control problem weeds.

Mechanical Control
In small plantings, hoe or hand pull weeds. In larger plantings very shallow tilling, about 3–4 inches deep, between rows helps minimize weeds.

Weed Control
Controlling weeds in an asparagus planting can be difficult, but it is a necessary step toward maintaining a high-yielding planting.

Watering
Good soil moisture throughout the summer is necessary for fern development and growth. Asparagus foliage seldom shows signs of drought stress, but a lack of water will reduce yields the following season. And remember that although asparagus is deep rooted, most water uptake occurs in the top 6–12 inches of the soil. If summer conditions turn dry, don't rely on deeper soil moisture to provide adequate water for your plants.

If extended dry conditions occur, provide deep soaking irrigation to your plants at least twice a month or as needed to prevent soil cracking. Moisten the soil to a depth of at least 6 inches.

This top growth manufactures carbohydrates and sugars that will be stored in the fleshy roots and crowns. The plant will draw upon this reserve for next year’s crop. The size of next year’s crop is directly related to the growth of this summer’s foliage.

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