



Food Safety & Nutrition

Pickling Asparagus



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Spring is here and one of the first crops of the season is asparagus. Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) is a member of the lily family and only grows in the cool spring weather. Therefore, it is a good candidate for freezing, canning and pickling.

Choose spears with straight, green (possibly tinged with purple) and tightly closed tips. The quality deteriorates very rapidly after it has been harvested, so keep it cool. Asparagus keeps more of its flavor if frozen than if canned. Pickling is another popular way to preserve asparagus. Here's how to do all three:

FREEZING

Select tender tips of asparagus. Wash spears thoroughly under running water and sort into sizes. Trim stalks and remove the scales with a sharp knife. Cut into even lengths to fit into freezer containers or bags. Asparagus should be blanched – immersed in boiling water -- for 2-4 minutes depending on the size of the stalks. The blanching kills enzymes that could cause the asparagus to become tough and taste woody. After blanching, cool it in ice water for the same length of time it was blanched. This stops the cooking process. After cooling, drain and pat dry. Pack asparagus spears into containers or freezer bags, seal and freeze.

CANNING

Wash asparagus thoroughly and trim scales and tough ends. Wash again and cut into 1-inch pieces or leave whole. Pack raw asparagus tightly into jars leaving 1-inch head space. Add boiling water. If you like, add ½ teaspoon of salt per pint. Remove any air bubbles and cover with two-piece lid. Process in a pressure canner at 11 pounds pressure for 30 minutes for pints and 40 minutes for quarts.

You can fit more into the jars if you pack the asparagus while it's hot. Using this hot pack method will give you a darker colored asparagus and will be more cooked. To hot pack cover washed asparagus with boiling water and boil for 3 minutes. Place the hot asparagus spears into hot jars, cover with boiling water and remove the air bubbles. Salt if you wish. Cover with a two-piece lid and process in a pressure canner. Process at 11 pounds pressure for 30 minutes for pints and 40 minutes for quarts.

Note that there is no safe way to can asparagus using a water-bath canner. If you don't want to use a pressure canner, you need to pickle it or freeze it.

PICKLING

Pickling asparagus involves covering raw asparagus with a hot pickling brine. The brine contains vinegar, which retards the harmful bacteria that otherwise would grow.

To pickle asparagus, wash and trim 8 pints of asparagus spears. Cut them to fit the pint or quart jars.

Combine 6 cups of water, 6 cups white vinegar, 6 tablespoons salt and 2 teaspoons of pickling spices (tied in a white cloth bag) in a pan and bring to a boil. Pack raw asparagus spears into the jars, tips down for easy removal. Cover with the boiling brine solution and add one clove of garlic per jar. Remove the air bubbles, cover with two-piece lids and process in a boiling water bath canner. Process pints or quarts for 10 minutes.

For more information about pickling asparagus and other vegetables contact the WSU Extension office (360-397-6060) and request the Pickling Vegetables publication.
