

Love Tips
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As the month of love and heart health ends, harvest time for the first shoots of asparagus begins. “Love Tips,” or asparagus, flourishes in many foothill gardens. This perennial plant sends out tender shoots which appear from March to June in Northern California, to the delight of many people who enjoy this delicious harbinger of spring.

As with most vegetables, the short and bountiful harvest season demands some method of preserving the tender shoots so that these may be enjoyed year round. Also as with most vegetables, preserving asparagus requires little more than a freezer with storage space. The National Center for Home Food Preservation recommends choosing young, tender spears and sorting these according to size. Trim ends, keeping the lengths even. Blanch the small spears for two minutes, the medium sizes for three minutes and large shoots for four minutes. Cool quickly and drain. Package without headspace in an appropriate freezer container or freezer bag, and pop in the freezer. Super simple.

For more fun, consider pickling those scrumptious spears. Many universities and canning supply manufacturers provide tested recipes for pickling asparagus and other vegetables. The National Center for Home Food Preservation recipe below results in a superior product that can be enjoyed all year.

Pickled Asparagus

For six wide-mouth pint jars

10 pounds asparagus
6 large garlic cloves
4½ cups water
4½ cups white distilled vinegar (5%)
6 small hot peppers (optional)
½ cup canning salt
3 teaspoons dill seed

Procedure:

1. Wash and rinse canning jars; keep hot until ready to use. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's directions.
2. Wash asparagus well, but gently, under running water. Cut stems from the bottom to leave spears with tips that fit into the canning jar with a little less than ½-inch headspace. Peel and wash garlic cloves. Place a garlic clove at

the bottom of each jar, and tightly pack asparagus into jars with the blunt ends down.

3. In an 8-quart Dutch oven or saucepot, combine water, vinegar, hot peppers (optional), salt and dill seed. Bring to a boil. Place one hot pepper (if used) in each jar over asparagus spears. Pour boiling hot pickling brine over spears, leaving ½-inch headspace.
4. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel; apply two-piece metal canning lids.
5. Process in a boiling water canner for 10 minutes. Let cool, undisturbed, for 12 to 24 hours and check for seals.

Allow pickled asparagus to sit in processed jars for 3 to 5 days before consumption for best flavor development.

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our new Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/>.