

Food of the Week > Asparagus



History

The origin of the asparagus is uncertain. However, some believe its cultivation began more than 2000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean region. Ancient Greeks and Romans believed that asparagus had some healing effect in particular for toothaches and bee stings. Later the American Indians dried the vegetable to use for medical purposes. Louis XIV, among many other historic characters, had his own greenhouse in which he grew the delicious asparagus. Primary production of asparagus in the United States is in California. However, the first growth of asparagus in the United States occurred in New England.

Asparagus Facts

Asparagus belongs to the lily family together with onions, leeks, and garlic. Its name comes from Greek and means "sprout" or "shoot". Asparagus exists in three different colors; green, white, and purple. The green and most common type is slightly sweet in flavor with a tender and crisp texture. It is grown in sunlight where photosynthesis makes its color green. The white asparagus is considered a delicacy in Europe. It costs almost twice that of green asparagus due to its limited supply. White asparagus is grown in the dark, thus requires specific procedure to yield its white color. Purple asparagus is deeply fruity flavored with 20% more sugar than the green and its purple color is due to an anthocyanin pigment.

Nutrition Facts

Asparagus has many health beneficial properties. It has a positive effect on the kidneys, liver, and bowel by functioning as a natural diuretic and laxative. Therefore, the vegetable is helpful in reducing constipation, bowel disorders, and symptoms of diabetes. The vegetable contains glutathione, which is an antioxidant, and is believed to prevent some forms of cancer. Asparagus is rich in vitamin A, C, and E, and does contain folate and dietary fiber. The vegetable is free from fat and cholesterol.

Serving size: 5.3 oz (about 5 spears); Calories 20 kcal; Protein 3 g; Carbohydrate 3 g; Fat 0 g; Cholesterol 0 mg; Sodium 5 mg; Vitamin A 8 % of US-RDA; Vitamin C 20 % of US-RDA; Thiamin 15 % of US-RDA; Riboflavin 6 % of US-RDA; Niacin 6 % of US-RDA; Calcium 2% of US-RDA; Potassium 400 mg; Dietary Fiber 3 g; Vitamin B6 10 % of US-RDA; Folate 60 % of US-RDA

Recipe of the Week > Baked asparagus w/parmesan cheese

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- 1 1/2 tablespoons bread crumbs

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 450° F
2. In a medium baking dish, toss asparagus with the oil and arrange in an even layer
3. Sprinkle with the Parmesan and bread crumbs
4. Bake for about 15 minutes or until asparagus is tender

Nutrition Information: 56 calories, 1.6 grams total fat, 7 grams carbohydrate, 3 gram protein, 3 grams fiber, 38 milligrams sodium, 1 milligrams cholesterol

Recipe is from Fruits and Veggies More Matters website. For more recipes and access to the recipe's full nutritional profile,

www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

Activity of the Week > Canoeing

Canoeing is not only a great way to get out and enjoy the nature and spend time with your family or friends, it is also a great way to stay physically active. In 1999, 17.5 million people went canoeing, 8.8 million went whitewater rafting, and 5.1 million kayaked in the United States .

Canoeing is a great way to work your upper body and it is a fun way to burn calories. If you weigh 150-215 lbs, canoeing for leisure (2.5 mph) can make you burn 180-260 kcal/hour. However, these are under calm and low-resistant conditions, thus if you paddle against the current or under rougher conditions you will almost burn twice the amount of calories.

There are three important points to consider when canoeing. The first one is the equipment. You need a canoe, an extra spare paddle, a lifejacket, a sun hat, a first aid kit, sunglasses for UV-protection, sunscreen, water, and food. Make sure to pack extra clothes in waterproof bags and tie them to the canoe in case of an unexpected flip. The second point to pay attention to is the weather. Avoid canoeing in windy conditions since the water can get rough, and never be on the water during a thunderstorm since you will be the highest point and possibly a target for lightning. Finally, choose a route close to shore on waters without fast currents.

Remember to ALWAYS wear a lifejacket, 75% of all canoeing fatalities in 1999 were not wearing lifejackets. Even skilled swimmers can be knocked unconscious with a flip. Never consume alcohol while canoeing, and always dress appropriately for the climate and water conditions, wear shoes. As always, consult with your physician before doing any new strenuous activity.