

Asparagus from page B1

the woody stem with a vegetable peeler, up to the tip, to tenderize it."

Asparagus is a member of the Lily family, and is Greek for "sprout" or "shoot." Its cultivation began more than 2,000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean. One could say asparagus is an international food. With its high tolerance for salt and sandy soils, asparagus is found in England, central Wisconsin, Russia and Poland. Researchers at the California Asparagus Commission discovered that ancient writings describe asparagus' usage in Egypt, and it has been grown in Syria and Spain since ancient times. Asparagus gained popularity in France in England, and was brought here by early colonists.

Low in calories (only 20 per four ounce serving) asparagus is a source of dietary fiber and potassium and sodium free. Asparagus is a source of folacin, a B vitamin necessary for blood cell formation and growth, that helps prevent cervical cancer, and birth defects. Asparagus is also a significant source of vitamin C, thiamin (B1), often called "the morale vitamin" because of its beneficial effect on the nervous system, emotions and mood, and vitamin B6, which plays an important part in our immune response, and protects us against disease.

It's no wonder that a person who serves asparagus is seen as a person with intelligence, taste and class.

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Garden from page B1

olive oil. Place onion, celery, and peppers into pan and cook. Place occasionally until onions are slightly translucent.

Add squash, garlic and stir. Add remaining ingredients except Parmesan cheese to the pan, including the pulp from the eggplant. Season with salt and pepper, stir, taste and adjust seasoning.

Place eggplant shells in suitable roasting pan. Fill shells with vegetable mixture, distributing evenly. Top with Parmesan cheese, place in oven and lower temperature.

to 325°F. Bake for approximately 20 minutes or until vegetables are tender and Parmesan has browned. Remove from oven. Place tomato coulis (recipe follows) on service plate. Place eggplant ratatouille on coulis. Garnish with herb sprig and serve. Serves 6.

Salt and pepper to taste

Put a small pot of water on a burner to boil. Prep tomatoes for blanching by removing the core. Carefully drop tomatoes into boiling water. Leave in water for approximately 25 to 30 seconds.

Remove from pot and shock in cold water. Skins should pop easily. Split tomatoes cross-wise, squeeze out seeds, chop tomatoes coarsely. Using a stainless steel pot, heat oil and butter, add garlic and cook for 20 to 30 seconds until butter starts to foam.

TOMATO COULIS

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 stick butter
4 tomatoes
2 cloves garlic, chopped
20 coriander seeds, ground

Add tomatoes, coriander and small amount of seasoning (salt and pepper), stir and cook on medium heat for 10 minutes.

Transfer to blender and blend until smooth. Keep warm for service.

Trained under Master Chef Milos Cihelka and in France under Chef Michel Guerard of Eugenie les Bains, Steven Allen is the executive chef of the Golden Mushroom in Southfield, which is celebrating its 25th year.

Fresh asparagus inspires these recipes

See related story on Taste front.

ROLLED STEAK STUFFED WITH CALIFORNIA FRESH ASPARAGUS

3/4 pound flank steak, butterflied opened
1 pound fresh asparagus
2 tablespoons horseradish
2 teaspoons minced garlic

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spread 2 tablespoons horseradish, and minced garlic on the steak. Then arrange asparagus spears in a single row over spread.

Roll tightly and tie. Roast in oven at 350°F. for 1 hour.

Remove from oven and let stand 10 minutes before slicing.

Recipe from the California Asparagus Commission.

WARM CARROT AND ASPARAGUS SALAD

2 pounds carrots
1 1/2 pounds asparagus
6 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 small or 1 large red onion, cut lengthwise and then thinly cross wise
1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 teaspoon caraway seeds
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice

Cut the carrots lengthwise into quarters. Cut them into 2-inch lengths. Blanch carrots in a large pot of boiling water with salt until they are just tender. Use a strainer or slotted spoon to remove them from the water.

Remove the woody stalks from the asparagus and cut the asparagus into 2-inch lengths. Blanch them in the carrot water for 1-2 minutes. Remove with a strainer, refresh under cold water. Reserve the cooking liquid.

In a large skillet heat oil over moderate heat. Add the onions and cook until very soft. Add 1/2 cup reserved cooking liquid, red pepper flakes, caraway seeds, paprika and cumin. Bring the liquid to a boil. Add the carrots. Cook for 3-5 minutes, or until the liquid is reduced and the carrots are coated.

Stir in the asparagus. Season with salt and pepper. Just before serving, add the lemon juice. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Serves 8.

Recipe from Bonnie Fishman, Bonnie's Patisserie.

SPRINGTIME STIR-FRY WITH SCALLOPS AND ASPARAGUS

3/4 pound asparagus
Boiling water

3/4 cup chicken broth

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 teaspoon light soy sauce

1 teaspoon sesame oil

3/4 pound sea scallops, cut in half crosswise, and patted dry

1 cup sliced button mushrooms or 3 to 4 ounces oyster mushrooms

1 medium clove garlic, minced

1 cup cherry tomato halves

2 to 3 green onions, sliced diagonally

2 cups hot cooked rice

Trim or break off asparagus spears at tender point; rinse and cut into 2 1/2-inch diagonal pieces.

In large saute pan, in boiling water to cover, cook asparagus until crisp-tender about 2 minutes. Do not over cook.

Drain and rinse under cold water. Combine chicken broth, cornstarch and soy sauce; reserve.

In a non-stick skillet, sprayed with non-stick cooking spray, heat oil. Stir-fry scallops and mushrooms with garlic until scallops are just cooked through.

about 4 minutes.

Stir in cornstarch mixture.

Cook, stirring, until sauce thickens. Add drained asparagus, tomatoes and green onions; heat. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve over rice. Serves 4.

Recipe from the California Asparagus Commission.

ASPARAGUS GUACAMOLE

4 cups (1 pound) fresh asparagus, or 4 cups (2 packages 10 ounces each) frozen, cut asparagus
1 small clove garlic, minced
2 tablespoons lime juice
1/4 cup canned, chopped green chiles
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cumin
2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped, seeded tomato

Cook asparagus in small amount of water until tender, drain well, and cool thoroughly.

In a food processor or blender, process asparagus and next five ingredients until mixture is smooth, about 30 seconds. Scrape bowl frequently. Remove from food processor bowl and stir in onion and tomato. Chill thoroughly before serving with tortilla chips, cut vegetables, chicken or seafood. Yield 2 cups.

Recipe from the California Asparagus Commission.

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