

Asparagus Season Is Short

By ELLY

For more than 2,000 years the tender, young shoots of asparagus have been a spring delicacy.

The ancient Greeks considered them a treat, and cooks all over the world have come up with their own ways of preparing them.

The short season is now at its peak and both price and quality are at their best for the locally-grown variety.

When buying asparagus, remember that one pound will serve two persons. Look for fresh, firm stalks and avoid loose tips.

To remove the woody end, hold the stalk at both ends and bend until it snaps naturally at the point where the tough portion begins. These ends may be used in soups, casseroles or sauces.

There are three recommended ways of cooking asparagus:

• The stalks in a bundle and stand upright in the bottom of a deep, narrow double boiler. Add 1-1/2 cups of boiling water. Cover with inverted top of double boiler and cook (unsalted) for 15 to 20 minutes.

• Split stalks lengthwise to about one inch below tip and place in a large frying pan. Add a sprinkle of sugar and cover with boiling water. Cover and boil over medium heat for five minutes. Uncover and boil eight to 10 minutes more.

• When cooking just the tips, soak in cold water for 10 minutes, then drain and steam for 15 minutes.

ASPARAGUS CASSEROLE

- 2 T. butter
- 1 small onion, minced
- 2 c. fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 4 T. flour
- 1/2 t. curry powder
- 1 c. chicken broth
- 1 c. milk
- 1 t. salt
- 1 t. Worcestershire sauce
- 20-24 stalks cooked asparagus
- 2 hard-boiled eggs, sliced
- 1 c. bread cubes, toasted

Melt the butter in a large frying pan. Add the onion, stir over high heat for a few seconds, then add the sliced mushrooms and curry powder and keep stirring for an additional minute or two.

Lower the heat, add the flour and mix well. Mix in the chicken broth, then add the milk. Stir until smooth and creamy, then season with the salt and Worcestershire sauce.

Place the asparagus in the bottom of a generously buttered casserole. Top with the egg slices and pour sauce over all. Sprinkle with the bread cubes and bake at 375 degrees for 30-35 minutes. Serves four to five.

ASPARAGUS A LA FRANCAISE

Place cooked asparagus on a hot platter and fan the stems in a circle, but keep the tips together. Serve with the following:

Have all the ingredients at room temperature before you start to make this. Whip 2/3 cup cream, then add 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg, three tablespoons melted butter and 1/2 cup grated Swiss cheese. Pile this fluffy, light sauce in the middle and serve.

ASPARAGUS DUTCH STYLE

Place individual portions of hot cooked asparagus on heated plates. Quarter one hard-boiled egg per serving and place attractively around the asparagus. Sprinkle with salt, pepper and a dash of nutmeg and serve with a tureen of melted butter.

The idea is that each person mashes the egg, sprinkles it over the asparagus and tops the whole with melted butter. This makes a very nice spring lunch, especially when served with mild cheese and toasted French bread.

ASPARAGUS ITALIAN STYLE

Place cooked asparagus in a heat-proof dish, then pour about two tablespoons of melted butter per pound on top. Sprinkle only the stems with grated Parmesan cheese, then broil under direct heat for 1-1/2 to two minutes.

ASPARAGUS HUNGARIAN STYLE

Place cooked asparagus in a shallow baking dish. Mix together one cup sour cream, two tablespoons lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste. Warm slightly but do not boil. Pour over the asparagus and top the whole with 1/2 cup fresh dry breadcrumbs (do not use the commercial variety) that have been browned in two tablespoons butter. This is enough sauce for one to two pounds of asparagus.

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