Asparagus

The fleshy green spears of asparagus are both succulent and tender and have been considered a delicacy since ancient times. This highly prized vegetable arrives with the coming of spring, when its shoots break through the soil and reach their 6-8 inch harvest length.

In California the first crops are picked as early as February, however, their season generally is considered to run from April through May. The growing season in the Midwest and East extends through July.

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What's New and Beneficial about Asparagus

Recent research has underscored the value of careful storage and speedy consumption of fresh asparagus. The key scientific finding here involves respiration rate. Like all vegetables, asparagus doesn't instantly "die" when it is picked, but instead, continues to engage in metabolic activity. This metabolic activity includes intake of oxygen, the breaking down of starches and sugars, and the releasing of carbon dioxide. The speed at which these processes occur is typically referred to as "respiration rate." Compared to most other vegetables, asparagus has a very high respiration rate. At 60 milligrams of carbon dioxide release per hour per 100 grams of food (at a refrigerator temperature of 41°F), this rate is five times greater than the rate for onions and potatoes; three times greater than the rate for lettuce and tomato; and twice as great as the rate for cauliflower and avocado. Asparagus' very high respiration rate makes it more perishable than its fellow vegetables, and also much more likely to lose water, wrinkle, and harden. By wrapping the ends of the asparagus in a damp paper or cloth towel, you can help offset asparagus' very high respiration rate during refrigerator storage. Along with this helpful step, you will want to consume asparagus within approximately 48 hours of purchase.

Wild asparagus (Asparagus racemosus) is a species of asparagus with a long history of use in India and other parts of Asia as a botanical medicine. Many medicinal qualities of wild asparagus have been associated with phytonutrients present in its roots, and especially one type of phytonutrients called saponins. Recent research has shown that the species of asparagus most commonly consumed in the U.S. (Asparagus officinalis) also contains saponins, not only in its root portion put also in its shoots. Saponins found in common, everyday asparagus include asparanin A, sarsasapogenin, and protodioscin. Asparagus even contains small amounts of the diosgenin - one of the best-studied saponins that is especially concentrated in yam. Saponins in food have repeatedly been shown to have anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties, and their intake has also been associated with improved blood pressure, improved blood sugar regulation, and better control of blood fat levels.

You may have heard about two foods — chicory root and Jerusalem artichoke — that are widely recognized as providing health benefits for our digestive
tract. These health benefits involve a special area of digestive support called "prebiotics" offered by a compound known as inulin. Both chicory root and Jerusalem artichoke contain rich concentrations of inulin, a unique type of carbohydrate called a polyfructan. Unlike most other carbs, inulin doesn't get broken down in the first segments of our digestive tract. It passes undigested all the way to our large intestine. Once it arrives at our large intestine, it becomes an ideal food source for certain types of bacteria (like *Bifidobacteria* and *Lactobacilli*) that are associated with better nutrient absorption, lower risk of allergy, and lower risk of colon cancer. Researchers now know that asparagus belongs among the list of foods that contain inulin. While approximately 5% lower in inulin than chicory root and Jerusalem artichoke, asparagus is a food that contains a valuable amount of unique carb and may provide our digestive tract with some equally unique health benefits.

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