

— EXPLORE —  
**FOOD &  
DRINK**

# Enjoy Asparagus



A GUIDE FOR BUYING, COOKING, USING AND  
LEARNING ABOUT VALE OF EVESHAM ASPARAGUS

[www.valeandspa.co.uk/asparagus](http://www.valeandspa.co.uk/asparagus)



# Vale of Evesham Asparagus

Asparagus is the most famous vegetable in the Vale of Evesham and it's certainly the most celebrated! Often known locally as "Asum Gras", "Sparrow-Gras" or simply "Gras", its challenging growing methods make it a proud delicacy best enjoyed between 23 April – 21 June.

The area has perfect ground conditions to grow asparagus and has a rich horticultural heritage that sees numerous farm shops proud to sell it in bundles (rounds). This guide will not only educate on the vegetable's history and growing techniques, but also explains how to cook it with some recipe ideas, so you can enjoy it to its maximum potential.

There's plenty more information available about asparagus on the festival's own website.

 [linktr.ee/ValeAsparagus](https://linktr.ee/ValeAsparagus)

 [info@britishasparagusfestival.co.uk](mailto:info@britishasparagusfestival.co.uk)

 [The British Asparagus Festival](#)

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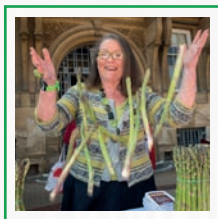
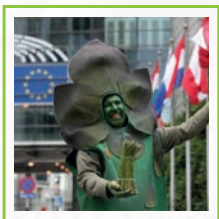
# Festival characters

## Gus

The Asparagus Man made his debut to the world at the opening event of the 2008 British Asparagus Festival in the Vale of Evesham. This larger than life character has gone on to be an ever-present figure at asparagus events.

## Gus fact

There are 3 types of asparagus, namely the green, purple and white varieties.



## Meet the Asparamancer

Jemima Packington, is the world's first and only Asparamancer, meaning she's actually able to predict the future using nothing more than a handful of asparagus, by tossing the spears into the air and interpreting how they land. She has made dozens of accurate predictions in recent years, including Brexit, Royal births, celebrity scandals and many sporting achievements To see the asparamancer's latest predictions visit the website.

## Gus fact

Asparagus is a member of the lily family.

# History & About

Vale of Evesham Asparagus became more popular following the success of the famous asparagus auctions at The Fleece Inn in Bretforton. Talks between tourism providers and local growers took place to decide how the area could capitalise on this popularity and “fill in” the week between the auctions with other asparagus-related events.

## The Vale Asparagus Festival was born!



In 2006, its first year, the festival attracted significant media interest and many visitors, largely through the marketing efforts of The British Asparagus Growers Association. This helped establish the festival as a key seasonal attraction, showcasing the Vale’s unique produce and heritage.

Plans for the 2007 festival progressed well, with local celebrity Mr Henry Sandon MBE from BBC Antiques Roadshow opening the event. He remained a strong supporter for many years. Celebrity chef Rachel Green became the face of the campaign, attending the festival and hosting cookery demonstrations, helping shape its identity.

During promotion of the 2007 event, the festival was described as “The British Asparagus Festival” and has been known by this name ever since. It continues to grow in reputation, welcoming visitors from across the UK and beyond.

The festival has also connected with other asparagus celebrations worldwide, including the Stockton Asparagus Festival in California, and has taken Vale of Evesham grass to venues including Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, the Japanese Embassy, Worcester Cathedral and the European Parliament. Today, it highlights the Vale’s place in a wider, international celebration of this iconic crop.

# Growing & Harvesting

Growing asparagus is a long-term commitment and a labour-intensive crop to grow. The crowns are grown from seeds for a year, transplanted and then grown for three years before harvesting can begin. The growing land is permanently dedicated to just that one crop, often for many years.



## Year 1

Asparagus plants start their life as seeds that produce crowns. These take a year to produce. Crowns are planted in furrows down the length of a field and kept weed free.

Soils must be light and free-draining to ensure that the roots establish fast without obstacles in the ground. Fields are rotated, but generally cannot be replanted with asparagus for around 30 years due to the disease pressure built up in the soil.

The Vale of Evesham is an important vegetable producing area as the soils are light, free-draining and warm up quickly in the spring. Heavier land outside the Evesham area is unsuitable as it does not drain freely enough for the crowns.

## Year 2

In the second year after planting, growers can take a first harvest cut for 1 to 2 weeks then leave the crown to regenerate. The first cut is taken from the moment the spears emerge in April.

## Year 3

By the third year yields take place between April and June.

# Harvest

Harvest time begins when the first spears show in April until June. From the end of June growers leave the still emerging spears to grow into asparagus fern ready for the following year's crop. This cycle is repeated until the yields dwindle and the field is no longer viable to harvest.

When the spears are ready, they are cut by hand with a short serrated knife, firstly to measure the correct height of the spear and secondly to allow a push pull action to swiftly cut the spear at an angle just below soil level without knocking the spear into the soil.



The spears are then laid in field trays, tip facing tip, to avoid soil getting into the edible end of the vegetable. They must be refrigerated as quickly as possible to maintain life and quality. They are then stored in high humidity for up to a week and are not washed until marketing is arranged. The quality deteriorates fast post-washing so it is imperative that field stocks are managed locally.

## Gus fact

**Asparagus can grow 10 inches  
in 24 hours!**

# Selling & Marketing

Traditionally sold in bundles, it can be “hundreded up” in 120 spear quantities for presentations and is held together by woven withy (willow twigs) shown below.



## Health & Wellbeing

Asparagus can make you feel good by boosting your libido, as well as assisting in weight loss and detox. The levels of Vitamin C and E in this miracle vegetable also make it great for your skin, nails and hair!

Asparagus is a mild diuretic and is believed to help detoxify the body. Eaten regularly, asparagus packs an almighty punch to diseases such as cancer and heart disease as well as boosting your immune system.

Seven spears (80g) is equivalent to one 5-a-day serving. An 80g serving provides 60% of the recommended daily allowance of folic acid, which can help expectant mothers to stave off infection and boost iron absorption.



# Timeline

Ancient Egyptians were reported to enjoy asparagus.



16th Century

Gained popularity in France and England. The early colonists took it to America and often called it the "Food of Kings."



The arrival of trains to Evesham in 1866 opened new markets to the growers from Badsey and surrounding areas.



The auctions at the Fleece Inn, Bretforton, were well under way, while elsewhere asparagus cultivation declined.



The media start promoting the festival as 'The British Asparagus Festival'



The rise of supermarkets with year-round availability of asparagus is matched by an interest in seasonal local food and the British Asparagus Festival around the Vale of Evesham.



The Romans prized asparagus for its medicinal properties.



Brought over to London from France, varieties of Battersea asparagus' started appearing in Evesham.



Large quantities of asparagus were grown around Evesham with 240 acres in Bretforton alone.



The Vale Asparagus Festival was born attracting lots of media attention.



Vale of Evesham Asparagus is given Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status.



Twenty years later Vale asparagus is still celebrated every year in the Evesham and beyond.

# It's protected!

The delicacy of Vale of Evesham Asparagus has supreme culinary status. It was awarded European protected food name status in 2015.



Protected geographical indication (PGI) status emphasises the relationship between the specific geographic region and the name of the product. It demonstrates when a particular quality, reputation or other characteristic is specific to its geographical origin.

This puts Vale of Evesham Asparagus into an elite group of foods and drinks which include Champagne, Cognac, Roquefort, Parmesan and Jersey Royal Potatoes.

The flavour and texture of Vale of Evesham Asparagus is driven by the growing conditions, a unique micro-climate and soil environment in the Vale of Evesham alongside the local knowledge and experience of how best to grow the product.

## Some of the specifications Vale of Evesham Asparagus meets include.

- It is produced only between St George's Day and Midsummers Day.
- It is within a specifically defined geographical area.
- The colour can vary from light green to dark green, with purple tips depending on the speed of growth and night-time temperatures.
- It is within certain curvature and seeding tolerances.
- It is within certain dimensions.
- It is sold either in a banded bundle, a flow wrapped pack or a plastic sleeve for supermarkets and naked in bundles for farm shops.
- Comprehensive records are kept by suppliers and growers relating to crown origin, crown delivery and method of production.

\*All products using the name 'Vale of Evesham Asparagus' and using the PGI logo have to conform to the specification.

# Where to buy

The best way to get your hands on Vale of Evesham Asparagus is to purchase it from one of the numerous farm shops and independent food stores in the district. Vale of Evesham Asparagus is most prominent between April and June but it's not uncommon to see it sold just outside this prime window.

In addition to buying the vegetable loose, there are many tasty creations produced locally inspired by the green 'gras', including pork pies, sausages and preserves. Don't knock them until you've tried them!

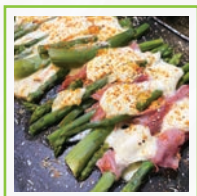
Below is a selection of local establishments where it's possible to buy the freshest vegetables and associated products.

## Where to enjoy

Between April and June, a number of the area's wonderful eateries put on a specialist menu to incorporate asparagus. Experience them whilst you can!

For restaurants, sellers, growers and recipes, visit:

[linktr.ee/ValeAsparagus](https://linktr.ee/ValeAsparagus)



# Asparagus sellers

## Broadway Deli

29 High Street, Broadway, WR12 7DP

☎ 01386 853040 | ✉ info@broadwaydeli.co.uk

🌐 www.broadwaydeli.co.uk

## Clive's Of Cropthorne

The Heath, Cropthorne, WR10 3NE

☎ 01386 860439

✉ rich@clivesfruitfarm.co.uk

📘 Clive's Of Cropthorne

## Chadbury Farm Shop & Café

Worcester Rd, Evesham, WR11 4TD

☎ 01386 446705

✉ info@chadburyfarmshopandcafe.co.uk

🌐 www.chadburyfarmshopandcafe.co.uk

## Ellenden Farm Shop

Evesham Rd, Evesham, WR11 8LU

☎ 01386 870296 | ✉ shop@ellendenfarmshop.co.uk

🌐 www.ellendenfarmshop.co.uk

## Hampton Farm Shop

Pershore Rd, Evesham, WR11 2NB

☎ 01386 41540 | ✉ info@hamptonfarmshop.com

🌐 www.hamptonfarmshop.com

## Revills Farm Shop

Bourne Road, Defford, Pershore, WR8 9BS

☎ 01386 750466 | ✉ darren@revillsfarmshop.co.uk

🌐 www.revillsfarmshop.co.uk

## The Fleece Inn

The Cross, Bretforton, Nr Evesham, WR11 7JE

☎ 01386 831173 | ✉ info@thefleeceinn.co.uk

🌐 www.thefleeceinn.co.uk

## Wayside Farm Shop

50 Pitchers Hill, Wickhamford, Evesham, WR11 7RT

☎ 01386 830546 | ✉ info@waysidefarmshop.com

🌐 www.waysidefarmshop.com

# How to cook it

People tend to have their favourite method for cooking asparagus, and for most people that method is steaming. Why not try one of the methods below and find a tasty new way to prepare these green delicacies once known as the food of Kings.



No matter how you cook asparagus, you'll want to start off by either trimming the asparagus or peel the asparagus stalks before cooking!

# How to...



## Blanch Asparagus

Blanching, or briefly submerging vegetables in boiling salted water, can be a wonderful way to cook asparagus. By cooking asparagus quickly in truly boiling water and then fully chilling it in ice water, you can “set” the green colour.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, drop asparagus in and cook until just tender, anywhere from 1 to 4 minutes depending on thickness. Drain and put asparagus in ice water until fully cool. Remove asparagus from ice water and pat dry. Then they are ready for service.

## Grill Asparagus

Grilling asparagus is a great way to preserve its grassy flavour - and introduce a smoky edge in the process.

Simply toss trimmed or peeled asparagus spears with a bit of vegetable oil and put them on a hot grill. Cook, turning to brown evenly, until tender, about 10 minutes total. Sprinkle with salt and/or lemon juice and serve hot or at room temperature.

## Microwave Asparagus

Microwaving asparagus cooks them in a similar way to steaming.

Set asparagus in a microwave-safe baking dish, add 2 tablespoons of water, cover, and microwave on high setting until tender, which should take about 2 to 3 minutes. Leave standing and covered for about 3 minutes and they will be ready to eat.

## Pan-Roast Asparagus

Pan roasting is a combination of steaming and sautéing and gives you the browned edges of grilled or roasted asparagus without the hassle of heating up a grill or oven.

Heat some cooking oil or butter in a large frying pan over high heat. Add asparagus, cover, and cook, shaking the pan now and again, until asparagus is browned and tender, should take about 10 minutes.



## Roast Asparagus

Put asparagus in an oven proof dish and cook until tender. Just add a little cooking oil to the asparagus to keep it from drying out in the oven. Sprinkle with salt and maybe a squirt of lemon juice before serving and enjoy.

## Sauté Asparagus

Cooking asparagus over high heat while stirring often leads to tender, bright green bites. This method works best with asparagus that has first been cut into 1 to 2 inch lengths.

Heat a large frying pan over a high heat, add cooking oil or butter and asparagus and cook, stirring, until the asparagus is tender, usually taking about 5 minutes depending on how thick the spears are.

## Steam Asparagus

Asparagus is usually steamed as whole stalks, but it can be steamed cut into bite-size pieces, if you like. Whether you steam it whole or chopped, place asparagus in a steamer rack and set over boiling water.

Cover and cook until asparagus is tender, 4 to 8 minutes depending on the thickness of the asparagus stalks.

## Stir-Fry Asparagus

Stir-frying brings out the nutty edge of asparagus' grassy flavour.

Cut asparagus into 1 to 2 inch lengths. Heat a wok or large frying pan over a high heat, add cooking oil and when it is hot enough to shimmer toss in the asparagus. Cook, stirring pretty much constantly until asparagus is tender and browned on the edges, 3 to 5 minutes depending on thickness of asparagus.

If you want to include garlic, green onions, ginger, or other aromatics, add them right before adding the asparagus and let them sizzle for just a minute before tossing in the asparagus.



# Recipes

The versatility of asparagus makes it a wonderful ingredient to work with. The variety of methods to cook it, discussed previously, is evidence that it can be enjoyed in multiple ways.



There are an abundance of recipes incorporating asparagus to choose from, so there's no excuse not to purchase the local delicacy and produce a quick and easy healthy meal for all the family to enjoy.

Over the next few pages are some classic recipes from businesses closely associated with the British Asparagus Festival for you to try at home.



## Gus says...

Why not try asparagus with hollandaise sauce for a tasty starter.

## Gus says...

Why not try asparagus with smoked salmon for a succulent main course...

# Revills' Asparagus "Twiglets"

### Ingredients

- 1 round of Revills' homegrown fresh asparagus
- 4 sheets of filo pastry
- Melted butter
- 1 tbsp poppy seeds
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 tbsp garlic mayonnaise or your favourite dip

### Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas 4
2. Clean and trim asparagus.
3. Cut the filo pastry into squares, slightly shorter than the length of the asparagus spears.
4. Brush each filo square with melted butter
5. Roll each asparagus spear in a square of pastry.
6. Place the asparagus spears on a baking sheet and brush with more melted butter.
7. Sprinkle half the asparagus spears with poppy seeds and the other half with sesame seeds.
8. Bake for 10-15 mins until golden brown.
9. Remove from oven, cool slightly and serve with mayonnaise or dip.



# Grilled Asparagus with Catalan Romesco sauce

(Recipe provide by Andy Tibbs of Poco Culina)

Serves 2 as a side or starter.

## Ingredients

- 6-8 Asparagus spears, trimmed as necessary at the stalk
- 2 thick rings of red pepper

## Catalan Romesco sauce

- 4 medium ripe vine tomatoes
- 2-3 cloves of peeled garlic
- 16 blanched almonds
- 1 tbsp of sherry vinegar
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- a pinch of sugar
- 1/2 tsp of hot paprika
- 2 tbsp of stale breadcrumbs
- black pepper
- salt to taste

## Method

1. Heat the oven to 180 degrees.
2. Score the tomatoes and add to a baking tray with a drizzle of olive oil.
3. Roast for 10 minutes.
4. Add the peeled garlic and almonds to the tray, roast for a further 10 minutes on the middle shelf.
5. Add to a blender with all the other ingredients and blend until smooth.
6. Set aside to cool to room temperature.
7. Set the grill to maximum, or use a griddle pan. Grill the asparagus and red pepper rings until they start to brown slightly and start to become tender but 'al dente'.
8. Add the Romesco sauce to a ramekin and garnish with a sprig of fresh, curly parsley. Add the grilled asparagus and peppers to a flat plate



# Asparagus soup simple and seasonal

Perfect to make when asparagus is in season in the spring. It's easy to make, tastes delicious and can be served hot or cold. Serves: 2



## Ingredients

- 250ml milk
- 250ml cream (double)
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 sticks of celery, chopped
- 1 leek, chopped
- 1 medium potato, grated
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 round of fresh asparagus, shredded
- Salt and pepper

## Method

1. Boil milk, cream, and potato until it's soft then add the asparagus for the last 2 minutes. Stir occasionally so it doesn't catch, then add salt and pepper.
2. In a separate pan, sauté off shallots, celery, leek and garlic once they are cooked, add to the other pan.
3. Once all ingredients are cooked and soft, blend until smooth and adjust seasoning, add a squeeze of lemon juice if desired.
4. To serve; re-heat gently for 3–4 minutes and serve hot in warmed soup bowls or serve chilled.
5. Garnish with diced cooked pancetta or crème fraiche and some cooked asparagus and serve with warm, crusty bread.

# Asparagus spring pasta

A super quick and easy dish for those mid-week meals that requires little preparation time.

Serves: 4 | Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 15-20 minutes

## Ingredients

- 400g asparagus
- 170g frozen peas
- 350g pappardelle pasta
- 2 knobs of butter
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 4 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 200ml crème fraiche
- Handful of chopped mint
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Parmesan, grated

## Method:

1. Put a large pan of water onto boil for the pappardelle. While you wait, trim the ends off the asparagus and chop into 2-3cm pieces.
2. Once the water has come up to boil, blanch the asparagus and the peas for 2-3 minutes and then place in a bowl of ice-cold water.
3. Keep the pan of water on the hob and boil the pasta according to pack instructions.
4. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a frying pan, then add the olive oil, shallots and garlic and gently fry for 5 minutes until soft.
5. Add the crème fraiche to the pan and stir to gently warm through making sure it doesn't split.
6. Add the fresh chopped mint, asparagus and peas to the pan and stir through along with a little of pasta water to loosen the mixture up.
7. Once the pasta is cooked, drain well and add to the sauce. Season to your liking and then serve with a grating of parmesan, a sprinkle of more fresh mint and a drizzle of olive oil.



# Asparagus, Haddock and Smoky Bacon Fish Cakes



## Ingredients

- 1 bundle of British asparagus
- 500g haddock
- 25g butter
- 2 rashers of smoky streaky bacon, diced
- 500g cold mashed potato
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp chopped chives
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Flour
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 200g fresh breadcrumbs
- Vegetable oil

## Method:

1. Clean and trim asparagus, cut off tips and reserve then chop the rest into small pieces.
2. Cook the haddock by steaming or poaching in milk then remove from the pan and leave to cool.
3. Remove and discard skin then flake the flesh of the haddock and remove any bones. Set aside.
4. Melt butter over a medium heat in a frying pan and fry the asparagus and bacon for 2 minutes. Allow to cool and remove from pan.
5. Add to mashed potato with haddock and the egg yolks, mayonnaise, parsley, chives, and nutmeg. Season well.
6. Divide the mixture into 6 and shape into patties. Dust with flour and dip in beaten egg and roll in breadcrumbs. Chill for 2 hours.
8. Cook the fishcakes in oil for 4 mins until brown.
9. Add the remaining asparagus tips to the hot pan and fry for 1 minute.

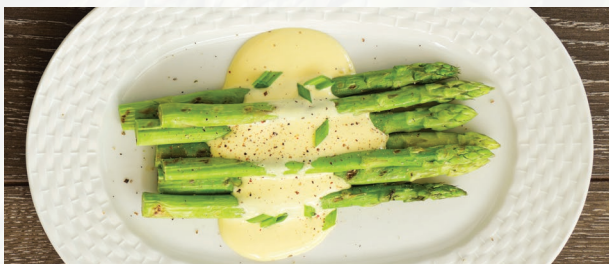
# Hollandaise sauce

## Ingredients

- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 1 tbsp cold water
- 4 egg yolks
- 250g soft butter
- Salt and pepper

## Method:

1. Put the lemon juice, water, salt and pepper in a heatproof bowl over a pan of hot water.
2. Make sure the water does not boil at any time.
3. Add the 4 egg yolks and 55g of butter and whisk rapidly until the butter melts.
4. Add another 55g of butter and continue whisking.
5. As the mixture thickens add the last of the butter, stirring from the bottom of the pan until it is incorporated in the sauce.
6. Remove from the heat and beat for 2-3 mins.
7. Put back on the heat and beat for 2 mins. The sauce should now be creamy.
8. Add a few drops of lemon juice and serve.





# Annual Asparagus themed events



23 April (St George's Day)

## **British Asparagus Festival Launch**

**The Fleece Inn, Bretforton.**

Celebrating not only St George's Day, National Asparagus Day but also the start of the English Asparagus season in the Vale of Evesham.

Morris, music & Morgans!

[linktr.ee/ValeAsparagus](http://linktr.ee/ValeAsparagus)

The Sunday before the last May bank holiday

## **Bretforton Silver Band Asparagus Auction**

**The Fleece Inn, Bretforton.**

The infamous asparagus auction! Hundreds gather in the courtyard of the pub to enjoy Bretforton Silver Band and bid for the season's largest, freshest and greenest Gras.

[www.thefleeceinn.co.uk](http://www.thefleeceinn.co.uk)

The Sunday after the last May bank holiday

## **St Leonards Church Asparagus Auction**

A more low-key event compared to the Band Auction, the Church auction follows an open-air service in The Cross.

[www.thefleeceinn.co.uk](http://www.thefleeceinn.co.uk)

## **The Asparagus Express**

A celebration of Spring, Steam and Spear.

[www.gwsr.com](http://www.gwsr.com)

[www.valeandspa.co.uk/asparagus](http://www.valeandspa.co.uk/asparagus)