

Asparagus Quiche

By: Brianna Engelson, Ellen Drews and Sophie Daudon

Plant Parts:

The “asparagus” that we eat is actually the shoot of the asparagus plant. Spears grow from crowns planted one foot deep. Although asparagus is a perennial, the plant cannot be harvested until three years after it is planted, as the root system has to develop and become established. After three years, each crown will send spears up for about 6-7 weeks during spring and early summer. It is during this time that asparagus is typically harvested. If unpicked, the spears will grow into woody ferns and produce red berries, becoming stronger in flavor and less tasty.



Origins and History:

Native to the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor areas, asparagus has been enjoyed for thousands of years. The Egyptians cultivated the plant over 2,000 years ago, revering it so much that they offered it up to the gods in rituals. Additionally, asparagus was pictured on an Egyptian frieze dated back to 3,000 BC! Later, the Romans adored the food, cultivating varieties that were so big that 3 shoots weighed one pound.

The earliest known recipe for asparagus is from 3rd Century A.D. More recently, Thomas Jefferson cultivated the plant in his gardens in Monticello. Asparagus has also been used medicinally, described by one 2nd century physician as “cleansing and healing.” Wild asparagus is much thinner than the asparagus we currently consume and other non-domesticated asparagus plants grow in vines and have developed thorns.

Nutrition Facts:

As mentioned above, asparagus has long been considered a medicinal plant. Rich in nutrition, asparagus contains 60% daily requirement of Folic acid, which aides with blood cell formation and prevents liver disease. Asparagus also has high potassium, fiber, vitamin B6, vitamins A and C (20% of daily requirement), and thiamin. The plant has less than 4 calories per spear, low sodium and does not contain any fat or cholesterol. Additionally, asparagus is one of the richest sources of rutin, which strengthens capillary walls.

Fun Facts:

- The red berries produced by mature asparagus plants are poisonous to humans.
- “As quick as a cooking asparagus” was an old Roman saying meaning something that was accomplished rapidly.

-White asparagus, which has less fiber, is the same variety as green but is grown without sunlight so chloroplasts don't develop.

Recipe:

Ingredients

1 pound fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1/2 inch pieces
2 (8 inch) unbaked pie shells
1 egg white, lightly beaten
4 eggs
1 1/2 cups half-and-half cream
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
salt and pepper to taste
2 cups shredded Swiss cheese

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Place asparagus in a steamer over 1 inch of boiling water, and cover. Cook until tender but still firm, about 2 to 6 minutes. Drain and cool.
2. Brush pie shells with beaten egg white. Sprinkle chopped asparagus into pie shells.
3. In a bowl, beat together eggs, cream, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Sprinkle Swiss cheese over asparagus. Pour egg mixture on top of cheese.

Bake uncovered in preheated oven until firm, about 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool to room temperature before serving.