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Cooking asparagus can be quite simple. This recipe uses basic ingredients to enjoy the springtime vegetable which is high in nutrition and remains in season locally for weeks to come.

Susan S. Yeske

Versatile asparagus is one of the highlights of spring. While we wait for the arrival of other local vegetables and fruits, asparagus stalks are springing from the ground, growing as much as 10 inches on a single hot day.

Asparagus is one of those vegetables that can provoke a love-hate response. Those who love it are enthusiastic advocates, while those who hate it can’t bear to see it on their plate.

Asparagus fans can enjoy it a variety of ways: steamed or roasted and topped with butter and/or grated cheese, wrapped in bacon with a poached egg on top, in casseroles, soups, omelets, frittatas and salads, cooked on the grill, or baked into quiche.

You can find asparagus in different shades including the common green variety plus purple, pink, and white. In order to achieve white asparagus, the sprouts are planted underground so no chlorophyll or color develops. This variety has a delicate flavor.

An ancient vegetable, asparagus has been farmed since more than 2,500 years ago, which it was first planted in Greece and Rome. A perennial that comes back year after year, asparagus is sometimes found growing wild.

Low in sodium and fat-free, asparagus is considered a nutritionally balanced vegetable. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture it contains folate, potassium and vitamins C, K and A. It contains antioxidants that are known to remove carcinogens from the body.

When you find asparagus at local farm markets and farms, store it in the refrigerator. The farmer likely washed it for you, but you might want to soak it again just before it is cooked because the stalks grow in sandy soil and some of the sand might be left behind. Soak the tops in warm water so they open up and release any sand that might be trapped inside. Don’t forget to chop about an inch off the bottom of each stalk.

For those who have not yet cooked asparagus or those who are looking for an easy recipe, this one comes from simplyrecipes.com:

**Quick and Easy Asparagus**

1 bunch medium asparagus (1 pound)

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1 teaspoon lemon zest

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the blanching water: Fill a medium saucepan halfway with lightly salted water. Bring to a boil.
2. Prep the asparagus: Prepare the asparagus while the water is heating. Rinse them thoroughly. Break off any tough, white bottoms and discard. Cut the spears into 1- to 2-inch sections, slicing the asparagus at a slight diagonal.
3. Blanch the asparagus: Add the asparagus to the boiling water and lower the heat slightly to maintain a simmer. Parboil the asparagus for exactly 2 minutes. Drain the hot water.
4. Toss the asparagus with olive oil, parmesan, and lemon zest while it's still hot. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve warm or room temperature.