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One garden vegetable that we have never discussed here in this space is the asparagus. A non-traditional, but relatively safe vegetable to attempt, asparagus is one which many Georgia gardeners have not tried.

Asparagus is one of the earliest harvested of all spring vegetables. It is considered a perennial which produces shoots from a rooted crown. These shoots, called spears, have large scales which, if not harvested, will develop into slender branches, forming the fern. Female plants produce seed pods which become bright red when mature.

If you are interested in asparagus production, select an area of the garden which is out of the way of the main garden area and will not interfere with normal tilling and other operations. Once well established, a properly cared for asparagus bed should produce from five to ten years.

A minimum of eight to ten inches of good topsoil is required. If not, you may want to build a raised bed and put about ten inches of good topsoil in it. Soil pH should be from 6.0 to 6.5. Broadcast five to six pounds of fertilizer for each 100 square feet. The fertilizer analysis should be determined by soil test results.

Plant your asparagus plants in late January or early February in middle and south Georgia. Crowns should be planted before buds initiate growth in the spring.

Normally, beds are four to five feet wide and plants are spaced 12 to 18 inches apart in the row. Asparagus crowns should be planted so that the top of the crown is six inches below the undisturbed soil bed. Crowns are usually planted in a six to eight-inch trench with buds upright.

At planting, crowns should be covered with two to three inches of soil. As the shoots begin to grow, the trench should be gradually filled with several applications of one to two inches of soil. Be careful not to damage or cover the growing shoot tips during the application of topsoil.

It's a good idea to refrain from harvesting any spears the first year. The second season, harvest for one to two weeks in south Georgia. For older plantings, harvesting should not exceed eight weeks.

Even though establishing an asparagus bed takes extra effort and time, the rewards can last for many years. Plant some!

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