



RECIPE for health

MAY 2013

featured food:
ASPARAGUS

By Peggy Crum, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Arriving from southern California, Mexico and South America, asparagus appears in the supermarket produce aisle as early as January. It's easy to forget that Michigan's asparagus season doesn't begin until April, maybe even as late as May. After it's picked, asparagus continues to use its sugar stores consequently the distance from field to plate really does matter. While most fresh asparagus is pretty good, the juiciest and most flavorful stalks come from the local harvest and may be worth the wait.

Asparagus comes in green and purple varieties. A word of caution when deciding to pay extra for the purple kind: it turns green when cooked! White asparagus is the result of a labor-intensive process called blanching. Soil is banked around the shoots as they grow to prevent them from turning green. White asparagus is more fibrous than its green counterpart and it tends to toughen more quickly as it's stored.

Asparagus is sold by the bunch, held together with a band. Pick the best asparagus by looking for a bunch that has spears that are uniform in size. Thin spears are more flavorful but also more stringy than large diameter spears. Further, look for firm, fresh spears with tips that are closed and compact.

Remove the band from the bunch and store it loose in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. If it's fresh from the garden, stand the stalks upright in a jar with the cut ends in water, cover with a plastic bag and place it in the fridge. When you're ready to prepare it, soak for 15 minutes and swish gently to get the sandy grit out of the tips.

The tips are the juiciest and most tender part but the whole asparagus stalk can be used. Thin stalks will snap where the tender and tough parts meet. A slight color change will guide you in cutting thicker stalks in the right place. Save the trimmings—they make delicious soup.

Asparagus and Walnut Salad

Recipe developed by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Makes 4 servings.

- ½ cup walnuts
- 1 pound asparagus
- 1 green onion
- 1 to 2 Tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon honey
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- 3 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spread the walnuts on a small baking sheet, place in oven and watch carefully; remove from oven when lightly toasted, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate. When cool, break the walnuts in half lengthwise.

Place 2 quarts water and 1 Tablespoon salt in a pot and bring to a boil. Prepare a bowl with ice cold water for shocking. Cut off the rough end of asparagus stalks. Blanch by placing asparagus in boiling water for 45 seconds. Quickly move the asparagus from boiling water to cold water. After the asparagus is cool, drain and place on cutting board. Bias (diagonal) cut asparagus into pieces no longer than 2 inches.

Chop the green onion very fine, and mix with lemon juice, honey and fresh thyme in a mixing bowl. Drizzle in olive oil and whisk to make the dressing. Taste; add more lemon juice as desired and season to taste with salt and pepper. Just before serving, toss asparagus and walnuts with dressing then plate. Shave parmesan cheese over each salad.

Try **Asparagus and Walnut Salad** for lunch at The Gallery at Snyder/Phillips, Brody Square and Riverwalk Market at Owen on May 1.