



Asparagus

It's asparagus season! This perennial crop takes a bit of work but is worth the effort since the crop can produce for up to 25 years and is a spring delicacy.

Crop rotation is not an option since asparagus grows in the same spot year after year, but here are some other ways to manage weeds and pests organically.

Weed Management

- Keep the plants mulched with a 4 to 6 inch layer of straw/hay or compost.
- Light cultivation with a hoe can be used on small acres, tilling is not advised since it can damage crowns and reduce yield and promote disease.
- Cover crops such as rye or wheat can be spring seeded in row middles.

Pest Management

- Grow hardy, pest resistant varieties (Jersey variety)
- Remove old asparagus ferns at the end of the season and burn asparagus berries to destroy habitat for asparagus beetle
- Beneficial nematodes like *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* destroy asparagus beetle grubs.

Crop Management

- Ensure proper soil pH. Asparagus prefers a pH between 6.5 and 6.8 and sandy, well-drained soils – this will help avoid most diseases
- Plant crowns in early to mid April in an 8 inch trench and gradually cover them with soil as the sprouts emerge.
- Seaweed meal can be applied in mid-summer to replenish the fronds
- Irrigate for the first two to three seasons after establishment and after spring harvest in the event of a drought
- Avoid over-harvesting in the first year after planting



Additional links and resources:

Organic Asparagus Production - <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/asparagus.pdf>

How to Grow Organic Asparagus - http://organic-vegetable-gardens.suite101.com/article.cfm/how_to_grow_organic_asparagus

Weed management for perennial and weed sensitive crops- <http://www.extension.org/article/18549>

