

Asparagus

TIPS

British is best when it comes to this seasonal delicacy

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Gardener's Salad with a basil and pine nut dressing Serves 4

Prepare the dressing and boil the potatoes, eggs and asparagus in advance and this salad can be put together just before serving.

INGREDIENTS

The salad

- 6 salad potatoes
- Pinch of chilli
- 3 free range eggs
- 12 asparagus spears
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper

The dressing

- 1 basil plant
- 1 handful pine nuts
- Small clove of garlic
- Pinch of salt
- 100ml olive oil
- Rocket leaves to serve

- 1 Boil the potatoes until tender, leave to cool a little then cut into wedges or in half (depending on size) and add a drizzle of olive oil, salt and pepper to taste, and a pinch of chilli.
 - 2 Boil the eggs for 10 minutes, plunge into cold water for 10 minutes, peel and cut into 4 wedges each.
 - 3 Put the basil leaves, pine nuts, garlic and a pinch of salt in a blender and reduce to a paste. Add the olive oil. Taste for salt, adding more if necessary. Transfer to a screw top jar and use as required.
 - 4 Snap off or trim the tough base of the asparagus spears. Have a bowl of iced water to hand.
 - 5 Half fill a frying pan with salted water and bring to the boil over high heat. Add the asparagus spears and, when the water comes to the boil, reduce the heat to a simmer. After five minutes, test the asparagus with the prongs of a fork and, if tender, drain and immerse in iced water to cool rapidly. This helps preserve the bright green fresh colour.
 - 6 When quite cold, pat dry and arrange on a plate, add a drizzle of olive oil, salt and pepper.
 - 7 Put a pile of rocket salad in the centre of each serving plate. Alternate 3 pieces of egg and 3 asparagus spears around the plate and fill in with potato wedges. Drizzle with the basil dressing and serve at once.
- Per portion (serves 4) Energy (kcal) 443, Fat (g) 38, Of which saturates (g) 6, Carbohydrates (g) 14, Of which sugars (g) 3

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The British asparagus season is back with us again! Freshly picked asparagus requires little adornment; cook swiftly in lightly salted water, test with a fork after 4 minutes, drain and serve with melted butter or olive oil and grated parmesan. To preserve the bright green hue when serving cold, first cook, then strain and plunge in ice cold water, then drain and pat dry.



Per portion (serves 6)
 Energy (kcal) 653,
 Fat (g) 53, Of which saturates (g)
 28, Carbohydrate (g) 24, Of which
 sugars (g) 3, Salt (g) 1.8

Asparagus and Prosciutto Tart Serves 6

Eat this delicious tart hot or cold, with a simple salad for lunch or as part of a larger main meal. Preheat oven to 220C, gas mark 7; then lower to 180C, gas mark 4.

INGREDIENTS

Pastry

- 150g plain flour
- 15g corn flour
- 1 teaspoon sieved icing sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 90g softened butter
- 2 small free-range egg yolks (reserve the egg whites)
- 1 tablespoon dry white wine or iced water

Filling

- 8 tender thick asparagus spears
- 4 slices of prosciutto cut in half
- 4 eggs
- 250ml double cream
- 50g parmesan cheese
- Freshly milled pepper
- 140g cubed pancetta

Utensils

- Loose based tart tin 26cm
- A circle of baking parchment 2-4cm larger than the tart tin
- Dried beans for baking blind

1 Put the flours, icing sugar and salt in a bowl; add the softened butter, egg yolk and white wine or iced water. Quickly and lightly knead the ingredients together into a smooth ball.

2 Wrap in cling film and set in the fridge for an hour to rest.

3 While the pastry is resting, prepare the asparagus: snap off the tough ends of the spears and cut the spears in half. Wrap each half tip in a half slice of prosciutto and reserve.

4 Put 250ml of salted water on to boil. Cut the bottom half of the spears into 1cm lengths and cook for 2-3 minutes or until tender. Blanch in ice cold water, drain and pat dry.

5 When the pastry has rested, roll it into a neat circle on a well-floured work surface. The pastry should be 3-4cm larger than the tin.

6 Line the tart tin with the pastry, trim, put the baking parchment on top and fill with the baking beans.

7 Put in the pre-heated oven for 10 minutes, or until golden around the edges, at the higher temperature. After this time, take out and discard the parchment and the beans. Paint the base with a little egg white.

8 Put the eggs, cream, parmesan cheese and pepper in a small bowl and whisk well. Add the asparagus bits and the pancetta, mix once and pour into the tart tin. Carefully arrange the asparagus prosciutto spears on the top of the tart. Cook at the lower temperature until set - around 20 minutes.

9 Take the tart out of the oven and serve with new potatoes and salad as a main course, or on its own with salad leaves as a starter.





Per portion (per crouton)
 Energy (kcal) 51, Fat (g) 2,
 Of which saturates (g) 0.3,
 Carbohydrate (g) 8, Of
 which sugars (g) 0.4

Asparagus Croutons **Makes 30**

INGREDIENTS

- 1 small fresh thin baguette cut diagonally into 1cm slices
- Reserved asparagus tips (see soup recipe)
- 2 medium free-range eggs, hard boiled and chopped finely or mashed
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 good tablespoon mayonnaise
- Seasoning to taste

1 Put baguette slices on a baking tray, drizzle with oil and cook until golden (10–15 minutes on the hottest oven setting). Leave to cool. Bring a small pan of water to boil, add salt to taste. Immerse asparagus tips in boiling water and simmer until just tender – say 2–3 minutes – testing with the prongs of a fork. Drain when ready, immerse in ice cold water and leave to cool. Drain, pat dry and slice in half lengthways.

2 Put chopped egg in a bowl, add the olive oil, mayonnaise, and salt and pepper to taste. Mix carefully. Spread mixture on croutons, top each one with an asparagus tip half, and serve with the soup.



Per portion (serves 4)
 Energy (kcal) 141,
 Fat (g) 9, Of which saturates (g) 1.5,
 Carbohydrate (g) 9, Of which sugars (g) 5

Asparagus, Pea and Mint Soup **Serves 4**

INGREDIENTS

- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 400g asparagus
- 200g frozen peas
- 1 tablespoon fresh mint, finely chopped
- 750ml-1l vegetable stock
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Put a large saucepan on low heat. When hot, add enough extra-virgin olive oil to cover the base. Add the chopped onion and sauté gently until transparent. If the onion starts to colour, add a few tablespoons of stock.

2 While the onion is cooking, cut off and reserve the tips (3–4cm) of the asparagus spears for the asparagus croutons (see above). Put the stock in a saucepan and heat through. Snap off the tough part (the base) of the asparagus spears, add to the stock and simmer for 10 minutes or so, then strain and reserve the stock, discarding the tough

cooked asparagus bases.

3 Now cut up the uncooked parts of the asparagus spears into 1cm lengths and, when the onion is soft, add them to the pan and continue to sauté for 5 minutes. Add the frozen peas, mint, a good grinding of black pepper, salt to taste and 300ml of the reserved stock. Bring back to the boil, then transfer to a blender and whiz until smooth. Add more stock to adjust the consistency. The soup should be thick but not gloopy. Return the soup to the pan and reheat when required. Serve with asparagus croutons (optional – see above).