COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

the Cochise County Master Gardener

NEWSLETTER

VOL. 4, NO. 3 MARCH 1993

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Robert E. Call
Extension Agent,
Horticulture

Asparagus offinalis

Barbara Kishbaugh
Staff Writer

Asparagus will perhaps be the first vegetable to make an appearance in the spring. It peaked through the soil on February 6 this year in our garden.

Asparagus can be grown from seed, but most gardeners plant rhizomes with crowns. Begin by preparing an 18 inch trench in loose soil with good drainage. When frost is longer a threat, place 10 to 20 plants per person in the soil with the asparagus crowns atop a mound of soil within the trench, cover with soil, and as the plants grow the first year, keep mounding soil up around the plants. Do not cut the asparagus the first year! The second year spears may be cut for two or three weeks and then allowed to go to seed. Assuring that asparagus is planted properly initially, this is the single most important factor when growing asparagus. Third year asparagus can and should be cut each day. Your perennial asparagus plants should produce for 10 to 20 years so care should be exercised when selecting a plant site. Asparagus grows quite tall and will block the sunlight to other plants in the garden.

Each spring a side dressing of fertilizer should be applied. In various locations in the country asparagus has strayed from its cultivation strictures and grows "wild". A little patience in the beginning will produce rewards each year. If you like asparagus which is rich in Vitamin A and beta carotene, it is worth the effort to establish a future plot.

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ASPARAGUS ESSENTIALS

Planting:

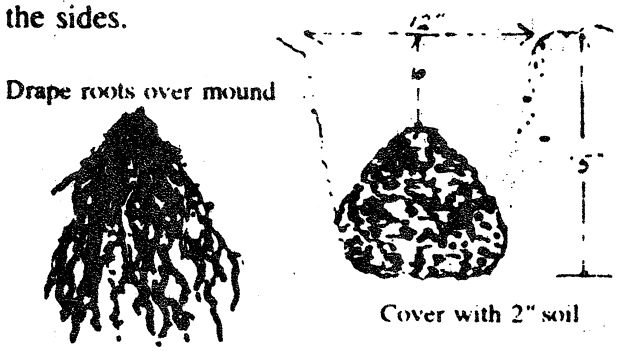
- The easiest way to start asparagus is from crowns.
- Plant in the spring as soon as the soil can be worked.
- Plants will take three growing seasons to become established.
- Allow ten to twenty plants per person (15 - 30 feet of row).

Preparation:

- Select a well-drained site; full sun is not necessary.
- Asparagus will thrive in slightly acid soil (pH of about 6.5), but will tolerate alkaline conditions up to 9.0.
- Eliminate all weeds by repeated tilling or by growing a cover crop a year in advance.
- About 1 week before planting, prepare trenches for crowns.

Planting:

- Soak the crowns briefly in lukewarm water before planting.
- Draw a hoe along each side of the prepared trench to form a mound in the center running the length of the trench.
- Set the crowns 18 inches apart on the mounds in the trench, draping the roots over the sides.



- To cover the crowns, mix 1 part manure to 3 parts topsoil and bury the crowns 2 inches deep.
- Water the bed thoroughly.

Care:

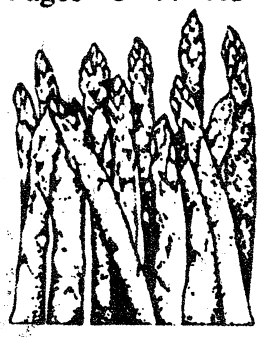
- First year: weed the beds carefully. Periodically add more topsoil/manure around emerging shots until the trench if filled. Then spread a 4 to 8 inch layer of aged manure, compost, or shredded bark around the base of the ferns. Water regularly. In the early fall, pull back the mulch and side-dress with 2½ pounds of a balanced fertilizer per 100 square feet. Cut down dead ferns in late fall and side-dress with 2½ pounds superphosphate per 100 square feet.
- Second year: cultivate lightly by hand until the new spears are several inches tall, then keep the bed thickly mulched. Side-dress with a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 at the rate of 2½ pounds per 100 square feet in the spring and early fall. Follow first year instructions for late fall.
- Third year and beyond: Maintain as for the second year, but apply the spring side-dressing after the harvest.

Harvesting:

- Plants started from crowns can be harvested lightly in the spring of the second year; plants started from seeds, in the third year.
- Harvest only those spears that are thicker than a pencil.
- Cut or snap off the spears at or just above ground level when they are 6 to 8 inches tall.

Reference: *Gardening: A Complete Guide to Growing America's Favorite Fruits and Vegetables*, April 1986, Pages 78-79. Addison-Wesley, publishers.

ASPARAGUS



THE AGENT'S CORNER

Robert E. Call
Extension Agent, Horticulture

Mexican Food Production

Mexico is a country that is changing and growing—a country that is three times the size of Texas and with a population of 90 million people. Over one quarter of them live in Mexico City. The capital city has a population of 20 to 25 million inhabitants depending on who is estimating, and is among the largest cities in the world. To feed that many people is an awesome task, equivalent to feeding Canada.

It was my privilege to lead 63 strawberry growers of the North American Strawberry Growers Association to Iraputo, Mexico, the traditional strawberry growing area, which is 4 hours northwest of Mexico City. Over 5,500 acres of berries are grown there. Many of the strawberries are frozen and exported to Australia, Canada and the United States. Vegetables, including broccoli, cauliflower and carrots are grown, packed, frozen and shipped to the United States. There are 30 processing plants in the area including Birdseye and Green Giant, which moved from California several years ago, and other U.S. firms. We visited one Mexican factory that was packing and freezing broccoli. They pack under 40 different labels which are all shipped to the United States. Their annual output of broccoli is over 8,600 tons. They also pack and ship other vegetables to the U.S. All of their products are marketed in the U.S. by Pepsico, which owns Pepsi, Frito-Lay, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

The Mexican producers must meet FDA and EPA regulations for processed and fresh produce just like crops grown in the States. Samples are tested at the border for pesticide residues. Any not meeting the U.S. standards are rejected and the producers/growers may be fined.

Reports that use of illegal pesticides in Mexico are greatly exaggerated and nearly all are not true. If sampling finds pesticide residues the products are stopped at the border and products already delivered in the States are seized. An investigation on both sides of the border starts and usually takes several weeks to complete. The producers lose money, market share and time. I know of several Mexican producers who have installed expensive, state of the art testing labs to monitor their products and insure that pesticide contamination does not occur. Millions of dollars are at stake if their produce is delayed at the border or is returned or dumped.

Sampling and testing of produce on both sides of the border insures that our food supply is the safest and least expensive in the world.

QUESTION: What do I need to do when planting or transplanting a tree, shrub or bush this spring?

ANSWER: Dr. Jimmy Tipton, U of A, Arid Ornamentals Specialist states, "Research results have caused many to modify their planting and transplanting practices. Perhaps the best-known modification is the elimination of organic amendments in the back fill to avoid interfaces which discourage root growth out of the amended area and increase nitrogen shortages." The American Forestry Association now recommends a less dramatic planting hole that is as deep as the container and five times as wide to encourage lateral root spread in uncompacted soil. The International Society of Arboriculture recommends a hole as deep as the container and twice as wide with an unamended back fill. Dr. Tipton recommends 9 steps for transplanting most container trees and shrubs, native or exotic. They are:

1) Prepare a planting area 3 to 5 times the

diameter of the container. Till this area to the depth of the root ball to aerate compacted soil. Dig through caliche layer.

2) Dig a planting hole in the center of the area no deeper than the container. Make sure the root ball will rest on undisturbed, firm soil and that the top will be at or slightly above the soil surface. This is important to prevent the plant from sinking.

3) Remove the plant from the container. This is usually very easy if you hold the plant by its trunk, turn it upside down and gently knock the edge of the container on a hard surface (wall or fence). If the plant is too big, cut the container rather than lifting the plant by its trunk

4) Either disentangle and spread encircling roots or cut and remove them. Score the sides of the root ball to encourage lateral root growth.

5) Place the plant in the hole and back fill with unamended soil. Do not tamp back fill with your feet.

6) Remove any nursery stakes. Stake trees only if necessary. Prune only damaged branches DO NOT remove one third of the foliage. Root initiation and growth is stimulated by stem buds and leaves. Therefore shoot pruning reduces root growth and prolongs establishment.

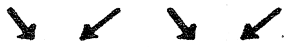
7) Form a well just outside the original root ball. Fill this well with water to irrigate the plant and settle the soil without compaction. Even if you intend to irrigate the plant with a drip system, continue to hand water for several weeks or months (depending upon the type of plant and season of year).

8) If you wish to fertilize the plant (which may or may not be beneficial), apply a nitrogen fertilizer over the entire area prepared in Step 1. Use no more than 15% actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet.

9) Apply 3-4 inches of an organic mulch over the entire area prepared in Step 1. Keep mulch away from the base of the plant. Even desert shrubs will benefit from an organic mulch.

ROSES PRUNING DEMONSTRATION
March 17th in Sierra Vista

A rose pruning demonstration is slated for 2:00 pm on March 17. Rob Call, University of Arizona, Horticulture Agent, will demonstrate techniques for pruning several classes of roses. The location of the demo will be at 2120 Lara Drive. Lara Drive is left off of Coronado, one street before Golf Links. All Master Gardeners are invited as well as the general public.



MARCH REMINDERS

- Winter prune trees
- Water periodically
- Cold-moist stratify seeds
- Order from seed catalogs
- Prune rose bushes
- Plant bare root trees
- Prepare spring planting beds
- Clean & repair drip irrigation system
- Plant seeds indoors for transplanting after last frost date

Staff:

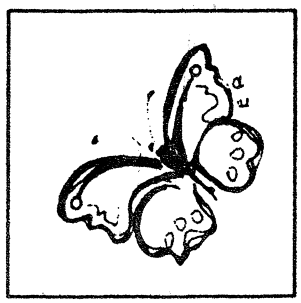
Jackie Dillon-Fast
Carolyn Gruenhagen
Barbara Kishbaugh
Elizabeth Riordon
Virginia Westphal

Articles to be published in next month's newsletter must be received at the Sierra Vista Cooperative Extension Office by March 24.

THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

Elizabeth Riordon
Staff Writer

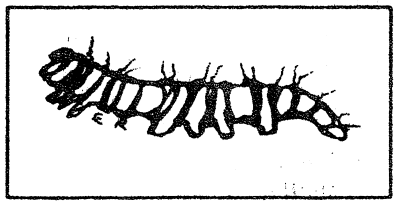
It is exciting to see butterflies flitting around our summer gardens. It may be possible that our mountains not only have the most varied types of hummingbirds in the nation, but that we also have more different kinds of butterflies and moths than anywhere else. In order to take advantage of this abundance, a wildlife butterfly habitat can be created in our yards or on our patios or balconies.



A wildlife habitat contains some basic elements: food, water, shelter, and nesting places. Adult butterflies cannot bite or chew. They land on something to which they have been attracted by color. There they taste with their feet the sweetness of the perch. If they have landed on a sweet flower, they suck up the nectar. Nectar and other liquids are all that sustain a butterfly. The pollen which they pick up from the flowers is helpful only to the plants and gardeners, not to the butterfly or moth itself. Water is necessary for butterflies, but bird baths and ponds aren't where they drink. They use water droplets on plants, puddles, and mud. So, if you have saturated the soil in your yard with insecticide, it won't be a very safe place for butterflies to visit.

Butterflies are food for flies, wasps, dragonflies, mantids, spiders, birds, toads, and lizards. Most butterflies can only protect themselves by hiding. Some don't need to hide because they taste bad or can make their predators feel ill if they are eaten. Others try to avoid danger by flying swiftly and erratically.

The hardest part of attracting butterflies, for me, is letting them live before they become butterflies. When I see a big caterpillar eating a prized plant, I try to remember to remove it carefully and put it somewhere else in the yard instead of squishing the offending eating machine. I also need to remember to leave the greenish, orange, or red egg masses on the plants where they have been deposited. Maybe this year I can begin to distinguish between harmful caterpillars and useful butterfly larva.



So, the ideal butterfly garden will have colorful, nectar-bearing flowers, damp areas or little puddles, or plants that are watered by a sprinkler, and bushy, shaded places for the butterfly to rest or hide. It kind of sounds like a garden that many other animals and insects would like to visit. Yes, it is that kind of garden! So, build a butterfly garden and enjoy the birds, wasps, bees, and moths at the same time.

See the back page of this newsletter for a list of butterfly-attracting plants.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
TUCSON, ARIZONA 85721

Address correction requested

BUTTERFLY ATTRACTING PLANTS

Annuals:
Cosmos
Egyptian Star Cluster
Heliotrope
Impatiens
Lantana
Marigold
Indian Paintbrush
Annual Phlox
Zinnia

Perennials:
Basket-of-gold
Wild Bergamot
Blazing Star
Butterfly-weed
Candytuft
Wild Columbine
Dame's Rocket
(*Hesperis martonalis*)
Lavender
Bergamot
Stonecrop
Mexican sunflower
Sweet William

Deciduous shrubs:
Bluebeard
Butterfly
Lilac
Privet

Evergreen Shrubs:
Waxleaf Ligustrum

Deciduous Trees:
White Ash
Wild Black Cherry
Flowering Dogwood
Hickories

Evergreen Trees:
Easter Red Cedar

Desert Area Plants:
Bladderpod
Golden Prince's Plume
Black Mustard
Long-beaked Twist Flower
Tansy
Mustards
Rock Cresses
Desert Candle
Wild Cabbage
Arizona Jewel Flower
Mountain Jewel Flower
Stonecrops
Globemallow
Mallows
Hollyhock
Wild Buckwheat
Punctured Bract
Triloba
Kidney-leaved Buckwheat
Legumes
Locoweed
Mesquite
Partridge Pea
Beans
Pickleweed
Goosefoot
Saltbush
Pigweed
Thistle
Bitter Brush
Senna
Clovers
Milkweeds
Dogbane
Mohave Aster
Goldenhead
Chuparosa
Rabbit Brush
Composites
Acanthus
Fog Fruit
Sunflower
Ragweed
Cowpen Daisy
Grasses
Rosacae
Malvacae
Blue Grama Grass
Desert Bunchgrass
Texas Ebony
Turpentine Broom
Queen Anne's Lace
Carrot Family
Fennel
Seaside Angelica
Cow Parsnip
Parsley
Citrus Trees
Chickweed
Purselane
Apple
Grape