

# TEN DELICIOUS WAYS TO DRESS UP SPRING ASPARAGUS

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The fact that decent asparagus is now available all year doesn't really matter. We've been programmed to think of it as something we must eat in spring. And so we shall.

The good news is that asparagus is wildly versatile. It's delicious raw (and, so long as you don't mind the cliché, wrapped in prosciutto), roasted, shaved, sliced, chopped, even pureed (think creamy soup). Its assertive flavor means it pairs well with robust meats (everything from the roasts of early spring to the barbecue of early summer), but it still is light and fresh enough to work in a salad (farro and feta would be nice).

So to help you get spring off to a great start, here are 10 fresh, easy ideas for eating more asparagus.

## 10 FRESH IDEAS FOR ASPARAGUS

**SOUP:** Cut 1 bunch of asparagus into 1/2-inch pieces. Steam until just tender and still bright green. Reserve 1/2 cup of pieces, then blend the remaining asparagus with 1 cup warmed half-and-half and 1 cup warmed low-sodium chicken broth or stock. Season with salt and pepper and a pinch of cayenne. Spoon into bowls and top with the reserved pieces of asparagus and a sprinkle of crumbled feta cheese.

**PIZZA:** Arrange thin asparagus spears over a prepared pizza crust. Top with slices of brie and pieces of torn prosciutto. Bake at 400 F until the crust is golden and the cheese is melted, about 10 minutes. Drizzle with balsamic glaze.

**PANINI:** Assemble a sandwich of sundried tomato pesto, cooked bacon, asparagus spears and fontina cheese. Butter the outsides of the bread and pan fry, pressing with a spatula until the cheese is melted and the sandwich is heated through.



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Asparagus bruschetta combines thinly sliced raw asparagus with chopped roasted red peppers, fresh mozzarella and torn basil.

**ROASTED:** Toss asparagus lightly with oil, then season with salt and pepper. Spread on a rimmed baking sheet and roast at 400 F until browned and tender. Bigger stalks are best for this. Sprinkle with crumbled blue cheese and toasted walnuts.

**PILAF:** In a skillet, cook 2 chopped shallots in 3 tablespoons butter. Add 1 bunch asparagus (chopped small) and 1/2 cup chopped pecans. Cook until tender and lightly browned. Add 2 cups cooked rice and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme. Season with salt and black pepper.

**GLAZED:** In a skillet, melt 2 tablespoons butter. Add a bunch of asparagus and 2 tablespoons maple syrup. Cook until the asparagus is tender and the sauce is slightly reduced. Season with salt and pepper, then stir in the zest of 1/2 lemon.

**NOODLES:** Using a paring knife or peeler, cut a bunch of asparagus lengthwise into thin strips. Boil 8 ounces of fettuccini pasta, adding the asparagus during the last minute of cooking. Drain and toss with butter, 1 minced clove garlic and grated Parmesan cheese. Season with salt and pepper.

**IN A JACKET:** Microwave a baking potato until tender. Cut in half and scoop out the middle, leaving enough potato flesh to keep the shape. Mash the scooped out middle and stir in a handful of shredded cheddar cheese, chopped fresh chives and chopped lightly



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Using a vegetable peeler to shave asparagus into thin strips makes it fast and easy to cook in the pan during the final minute of boiling the pasta in this fettuccine dish.

steamed asparagus. Spoon back into the potato skins and place on a baking sheet. Bake at 400 F for 15 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and lightly browned.

**BRUSCHETTA:** Thinly slice a bunch of asparagus diagonally. Combine with 1 cup chopped roasted red peppers, 1 cup diced fresh mozzarella cheese, 1/4 cup torn basil leaves, 1 minced clove garlic, 2 tablespoons olive oil, 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar and 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard. Season with salt and black pepper. Serve over slices of rustic bread.

**SALAD:** Boil 1 pound fingerling potatoes in salted water, then drain and cool. Slice the potatoes into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Combine with 1 bunch asparagus, lightly steamed and cut into 2-inch pieces. Dress with 1/2 cup creme fraiche, 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 2 tablespoons chopped chives, 1 tablespoon finely minced fresh rosemary, salt and pepper.



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Asparagus is a spring vegetable that pairs as well with seasonal roasts as with lighter fare.