

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**Welcome Spring with Asparagus**  
**April 2011**

Nothing welcomes spring in the kitchen more than fresh asparagus. Ideal spring conditions can cause these flavorful stalks to grow more than ten inches in a twenty-four hour period, which is good for us who want to cook with it. If you have only used the canned asparagus, I encourage you to try using the fresh this spring for a whole new taste. I actually didn't like asparagus until several years ago when I tried it roasted in the oven with a lemon vinaigrette over it. My mother loved fresh asparagus and always cooked it in the microwave, which is a quick and easy side dish, but roasting brings out a different flavor and makes the tips of the stalks somewhat crispy and browned which I loved. Now I eat asparagus all different ways from rolling it in phyllo dough with cheese for appetizers to stir fried with chicken for a main dish to asparagus soufflé for a light lunch with a salad.

Asparagus will deteriorate quickly and starts losing its sweetness as soon as it is picked, so purchase what you need the day you are using it if possible. If you need to store it for a day or so, stand it upright in a jar of water, like flowers, and cover the top loosely with a plastic bag. Look for tightly closed tips for freshness.

When preparing asparagus for cooking, I usually just cut off the bottom 1-2 inches which can be tough and woody. They say you can bend the stalk and it will break off at the tender point but it usually breaks wherever I make it break, so this doesn't work well for me! The size doesn't really matter, smaller is not necessarily younger or more tender. If it seems to be tough or stringy, you can peel off the outside with a vegetable peeler before cooking, but this is not usually necessary.

Be careful not to overcook your asparagus as it will deplete the flavor and discolor. Cooking in iron will also cause a reaction that will discolor the asparagus and the pan, so use stainless steel or non-stick pans. You want the asparagus to be fork tender but still retain its bright green color. If you are grilling asparagus, use two

skewers to create a raft that is easy to turn over and cook without falling through the rack.



To roast asparagus, toss it with a little olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place on a baking sheet in a single layer and roast at 400 degrees for about 15 minutes or until fork tender and lightly browned. For a simple and tasty dinner, try the Sautéed Honey Mustard Chicken and Asparagus. This combines bites of sautéed chicken with asparagus and green onions in a honey mustard sauce. Made in one pan, it goes together quickly and easily. Serve over rice or noodles with a slice of crusty bread and a congealed salad made that morning or the day before for a weeknight family meal.

For more ideas on using asparagus and collard greens come to the Seasonal Eating cooking demonstration on Wednesday at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call 684-5971 for more information or to register by Monday afternoon and bring \$5 to class. You can also visit the Bedford County Extension website Seasonal Eating page for recipes and information.

#### Sautéed Honey Mustard Chicken and Asparagus

- 1/2 cup + 2 tablespoons chicken broth, divided
- 1/4 cup coarse ground mustard or Dijon style mustard
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme (or 1 tablespoon fresh)
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into 1/2" cubes
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 bunch asparagus spears, trimmed and cut into 1" sections
- 4 green onions, sliced

In a medium bowl combine 1/2 cup chicken broth, mustard, honey and thyme. Set aside. In a small bowl, combine remaining 2 tablespoons chicken broth and cornstarch. Set aside. In a large skillet, heat olive oil and butter together over medium high heat. When bubbling, add chicken. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until just cooked through, about 5 minutes. Add asparagus and green onions and sauté until asparagus is tender, about 3 minutes. Add reserved honey mustard mixture and stir to coat. Stir in the cornstarch mixture and bring to a boil, cooking until thickened. Serve over rice or noodles.