

Seasonal Eating
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Asparagus: The Sign of Spring
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Spring is here. Easter weekend was absolutely beautiful. And with spring comes asparagus. You know how Easter always signals the wearing of white? Well for me, asparagus always signals the start of spring.

My grandfather worked in the asparagus fields of Michigan as a young man and I always think of him when I have asparagus. Last summer while on vacation, I was hunting gravesites for my family history around Hart, Michigan. As we drove through the countryside to the cemeteries, the fields were covered with the fern like lacy tops of the asparagus plants. It was beautiful and quite different from the corn fields and soybean fields around here.

I think of asparagus with fish and eggs and ham, perfect dishes for spring. I also think of bacon and Parmesan cheese and lemon as good flavors to accent asparagus. Over the years I have done many things with asparagus from quiche (one of my favorites) to stir fries to soufflés and even wrapped up in phyllo dough for appetizers. But I still come back to the simple basics when I want a great side dish for ham or pork roast or chicken and that is roasted asparagus.

Drizzled with a little olive oil and sprinkled with salt and pepper, it brings out the nuttiness and sweetness of the asparagus. Roast it at 400 degrees just until still a little firm – nothing is worse than overcooked, grey asparagus. I love that for just me, I can do it in my toaster oven or if a group is coming I can use a sheet pan in the oven.

To dress it up just a little, you can use a hollandaise sauce or beurre blanc (white wine and shallots with emulsified butter –say yum!) sauce. I also like to use a vinaigrette over my asparagus for a lighter touch and sprinkle with some toasted almonds for a little crunch. I've used lemon, orange or balsamic vinaigrettes that work well. Just look for spears with tightly closed heads and fresh looking ends that aren't wilted or dried out for the freshest and best tasting asparagus. Welcome spring!

Visit the Bedford County Extension website for more recipes and information about seasonal eating (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Roasted Asparagus with Lemon and Almonds

- 1 bunch asparagus spears
- olive oil
- kosher salt and pepper
- 1 1/2 teaspoons whole grain mustard
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup toasted slivered almonds



Snap the asparagus spear ends off where they naturally break. Toss with a little olive oil and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Lay in a single layer on a baking sheet. Roast at 400 degrees for about 15 minutes or until crisp tender, as desired. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk together the mustard, honey, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Gradually drizzle in the olive oil while still whisking. Lay the cooked asparagus on the serving platter and spoon the vinaigrette over the top. Sprinkle with toasted almonds.