ASPARAGUS, AN IDEAL SURVIVAL VEGETABLE

by FARMERIK

Asparagus is an ideal crop to grow because it is harvested after the early wild greens, [cow slips, fiddleheads and dandelion greens here in Southern New England], but before the early spinach and lettuce are ready in the garden. Instead of eating stored vegetables during this time, you can be eating fresh. It is also grown in a permanent bed, and only needs attention at certain times of the year, so it is ideal to establish at a remote retreat.

You need a sunny spot, frequently moist soil in the Springtime, but no flooding or standing water. Partway down a slope from a spring or stream would be ideal for a "wild" bed. It doesn't need any more water than a salad garden, so water it like that where you live. To plant, dig a hole or trench, and fill the bottom with a few inches of rich sandy loam or compost. Spread out the roots, and cover with a couple more inches of good light soil. As the shoots come up, add more layers until you end up with a mound over the plants and shoots coming through. The deeper you plant it, the longer it will be before the bed comes into production, but the longer the bed will last. Most people choose 8 to 16 inches below the surrounding ground level.

If you have a clay sub soil that will not drain, don't go below that at all. To get the bed well established, don't pick it the first year, and for just a couple weeks the second. After that it will bear for a month and a half, in May and June where I live. The production will peak at about three weeks, when you may need to cut stalks every other day to keep up. Right after the harvest is over, mulch heavily around the stalks, don't cover them.

Since you won't be eating it again until next spring, you can use livestock bedding right from the stalls with fresh manure in it, or any rich material that will compost during the coming year. Asparagus likes or at least tolerates salt, and it keeps down grasses, so we spread any old salt from preserving meat over it. Our bed is over 20 years old, and still going. Peak production was at around seven years.