

Asparagus

Revised 2008

Thermal Properties

	English	Metric
Moisture, %	93.22	--
Protein, %	2.20	--
Fat, %	0.12	--
Carbohydrate, %	3.88	--
Fiber, %	2.10	--
Ash, %	0.58	--
Specific Heat Above Freezing	0.96 Btu/lb*°F	4.03 kJ/(kg*K)
Specific Heat Below Freezing	0.43 Btu/lb*°F	1.79 kJ/(kg*K)
Latent Heat of Fusion	133 Btu/lb	309 kJ/kg

Storage Conditions

	Fresh	Frozen	Canned
Temperature	32-36°F (0-2°C)	-10 to 0°F (-23 to -18°C)	32-40°F (0-5°C)
Relative Humidity	95-99%	Vapor-proof packaging	
Storage Period	2-3 weeks	1 year +	1 year +
Highest Freezing Point	30.9°F (-0.6°C)		

Storage of Fresh Asparagus

Fresh asparagus can be stored a maximum of two to three weeks under ideal conditions of 36°F (2°C) with 95 to 99% relative humidity. The storage period is usually limited by water loss or spear toughening. The actual storage life depends on various factors, such as: 1) degree of openness of the tips at harvest; those with tightly closed tips keep better than those with even slightly "feathered" tips; 2) duration of exposure to warm conditions and prevailing temperature between harvest and cooling or processing; 3) adequacy of cooling; and 4) temperature during storage. If asparagus is to be stored 10 days or less, 32°F (0°C) is recommended. For longer storage, 36°F (2°C) is recommended because asparagus is susceptible to chilling injury (CI) during prolonged storage at 32°F (0°C).

Growth and geotropic curvature, loss of tenderness, loss of flavor, loss of vitamin C content, and development of decay take place more rapidly at higher temperatures, particularly those above 40°F

(4.4°C). A delay of 4 hours between harvest and cooling can increase shear force due to toughening by 40%; hence, asparagus should be cooled immediately after harvest. This is usually done by hydrocooling, which should be done long enough to cool the spears at the center of each container to as close to 32°F (0°C) as possible. It is recommended that ice be manufactured only from potable water chlorinated at 50 ppm, or pH 7, in order to avoid transfer of decay and pathogenic organisms to the products.

Controlled atmosphere (CA) storage is beneficial to asparagus even for short periods because it retards decay, toughening, and loss of green color. If the temperature is maintained at 32 to 37°F (0 to 3°C), a CO₂ level of 10-14% in air is recommended. Less than 10% O₂ causes spear discoloration and higher CO₂ levels cause pitting, usually just below the spear tips. Commercially, this is used more during transit than in storage.

Packaged asparagus spears should stand upright on wet, absorbent material to prevent drying out in storage. Alternatively, packaging in perforated plastic bags also is feasible. At temperatures higher than 36°F (2°C), the spears can continue to grow. To avoid curvature, asparagus spears should never be packed horizontally. Setting spears in water, as is often done at retail, is undesirable even if they are sold by the bunch because the water makes an ideal medium for the propagation of bacteria. This is particularly true when the spears are not in refrigerated displays and when the water is not frequently changed. Instead, they can be sprinkled with cold water.

Diseases and Injuries

Bacterial Soft Rot	Soft, mushy decay; develops an offensive odor at temperatures above 40°F (4.4°C). Affects the tips and cut ends of injuries. There may be more decay problems with green butt asparagus than with white butt asparagus. Control: Discard all badly bruised or crushed stalks and refrigerate promptly. Store only spears with tightly closed heads; spears with feathered tips decay more quickly.
Fusarium Rot	White, fluffy mold on tips, later becoming slightly pink. Affected tissues are water-soaked at first, later becoming yellow or brown. No odor, but final stage is soft and watery. Control: Prompt cooling and refrigeration to below 40°F (4.4°C); the lower the better.
Gray Mold Rot	Water-soaked areas with white surface mold; later grayish-brown mold growth and granular spore masses. Control: Field sanitation. Cool and refrigerate promptly to below 40°F (4.4°C); the lower the better.
Chilling Injury	Chilling injury occurs in about 10 days at 32°F (0°C), but not at all at 36°F (2°C). Symptoms are a dull, limp, wilted appearance and grayish discoloration of the spear tips; more severe chilling may cause darkened spots or streaks near the spear tips. Control: Do not hold asparagus below 36°F (2°C) except for short term storage.
Senescence	Asparagus spears that are harvested too mature or that are stored at above optimal

(Toughening and Feathering)

temperatures age rapidly and develop symptoms of senescence including toughening that develops from the butt end up, and feathering, which is opening of the bracts at the spear tip due to outgrowth of underlying buds.

Control: Do not store asparagus that do not have very tight bracts at the tip and avoid exposure to storage temperatures greater than 40°F (4.4°C). Spears with narrower diameter tend to more prone to toughening than spears with thicker diameter because for a given length, a narrower diameter denotes slower growth and greater spear maturity.

Freezing

Blanching is advisable for retention of color during storage. Blanching for 2 to 3 minutes in steam or hot water, depending on the diameter of the stalks, is usually sufficient. A moisture-vapor-proof package is necessary to prevent desiccation.

Frozen asparagus loses its brilliant green color rather rapidly when stored at temperatures above 0°F (-18°C). The chlorophyll changes to a brownish color. Exposure to elevated temperatures for short periods of time is not critical but repeated exposures do damage the color and cause water vapor to transpire from spears and condense as ice crystals within the package. As with most frozen products, asparagus should be frozen as rapidly as possible.

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