

A GUIDE FOR BUYING, COOKING, USING AND LEARNING ABOUT VALE OF EVESHAM ASPARAGUS

www.valeandspa.co.uk/asparagus







# Vale of Evesham **Asparagus**

Asparagus is the most famous vegetable in the Vale of Evesham and it's certainly the most celebrated! Often known locally as "Asum Gras", "Sparrow-Gras" or simply "Gras", its challenging growing methods make it a proud delicacy best enjoyed between 23 April - 21 June.

The area has perfect ground conditions to grow asparagus and has a rich horticultural heritage that sees numerous farm shops proud to sell it in bundles (rounds).

This guide will not only educate on the vegetable's history and growing techniques, but also explains how to cook it with some recipe ideas, so you can enjoy it to its maximum potential.

There's plenty more information available about asparagus on the festival's own website.

🌐 www.britishasparagusfestival.co.uk 🔀 info@ britishasparagusfestival.co.uk

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🚹 The British Asparagus Festival **@** 01386 565373

www.britishasparagus.com

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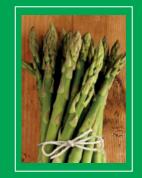
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# Festival characters

### Gus

The Asparagus Man made his debut to the world at the opening event of the 2008 British Asparagus Festival in the Vale of Evesham. This larger than life character has gone on to be an ever-present figure at asparagus events.

### **Gus fact**

There are 3 types of asparagus, namely the green, purple and white varieties.





# **Meet the Asparamancer**

Jemima Packington, is the world's first and only Asparamancer, meaning she's actually able to predict the future using nothing more than a handful of asparagus, by tossing the spears into the air and interpreting how they land. She has made dozens of accurate predictions in recent years, including Brexit, Royal births, celebrity scandals and many sporting achievements.

### **Gus fact**

Asparagus is a member of the lily family

# **History & About**

Vale of Evesham Asparagus became more popular following the success of the famous asparagus auctions, at The Fleece Inn in Bretforton. Talks between tourism industry providers and local growers took place to decide how the area could capitalise on this popularity and "fill in" the week between the auctions at The Fleece with other asparagus related events.

### The Vale Asparagus Festival was born!

In 2006, its first year, the festival attracted a lot of media interest and also many visitors to our area largely through the marketing efforts of The British Asparagus Growers Association.

Plans for the 2007 festival progressed well, with festival friend and local celebrity Mr Henry Sandon MBE from BBC Antiques Roadshow opening the event. Celebrity chef Rachel Green became the face of the campaign and even attended the festival doing cookery demonstrations.





During the promotion of the 2007 event the Vale Asparagus Festival was being promoted by the media as "The British Asparagus Festival" and has been known by this name ever since. During this time, the festival was communicating with the Stockton Asparagus Festival in California – who were very interested in The Vale's new venture. This was particularly exciting considering their festival is an enormous event worth many thousands of dollars to their local economy.

# **Growing & Harvesting**

Growing asparagus is a long-term commitment and a labour-intensive crop to grow. The crowns are grown from seeds for a year, transplanted and then grown for three years before harvesting can begin. The growing land is permanently dedicated to just that one crop, often for many years.



### Year 1

Asparagus plants start their life as seeds that produce crowns. These take a year to produce. Crowns are planted in furrows down the length of a field and kept weed free.

Soils must be light and free-draining to ensure that the roots establish fast without obstacles in the ground. Fields are rotated, but generally cannot be replanted with asparagus for around 30 years due to the disease pressure built up in the soil.

The Vale of Evesham is an important vegetable producing area as the soils are light, free-draining and warm up quickly in the spring. Heavier land outside the Evesham area is unsuitable as it does not drain freely enough for the crowns.

### Year 2

In the second year after planting, growers can take a first harvest cut for 1 to 2 weeks then leave the crown to regenerate. The first cut is taken from the moment the spears emerge in April.

### Year 3

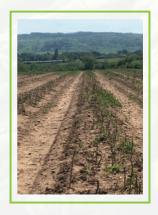
By the third year yields take place between April and June.

Harvest

Harvest time begins when the first spears show in April until June. From the end of June growers leave the still emerging spears to grow into asparagus fern ready for the following year's crop. This cycle is repeated until the yields dwindle and the field is no longer viable to harvest.

When the spears are ready, they are cut by hand with a short serrated knife, firstly to measure the correct height of the spear and secondly to allow a push pull action to swiftly cut the spear at an angle just below soil level without knocking the spear into the soil.





The spears are then laid in field trays, tip facing tip, to avoid soil getting into the edible end of the vegetable. They must be refrigerated as quickly as possible to maintain life and quality. They are then stored in high humidity for up to a week and are not washed until marketing is arranged. The quality deteriorates fast post-washing so it is imperative that field stocks are managed locally.

### **Gus fact**

Asparagus can grow 10 inches in 24 hours!

# **Selling & Marketing**

Traditionally sold in bundles, it can be "hundreded up" in 120 spear quantities for presentations and is held together by woven withy (willow twigs) shown below.



# **Health & Wellbeing**

Asparagus can make you feel good by boosting your libido, as well as assisting in weight loss and detox. The levels of Vitamin C and E in this miracle vegetable also make it great for your skin, nails and hair!

Asparagus is a mild diuretic and is believed to help detoxify the body. Eaten regularly, asparagus packs an almighty punch to diseases such as cancer and heart disease as well as boosting your immune system.

Seven spears (80g) is equivalent to one 5-a-day serving. An 80g serving provides 60% of the recommended daily allowance of folic acid, which can help expectant mothers to stave off infection and boost iron absorption.



# **Timeline**

I HALL

Ancient Egyptians were reported to enjoy asparagus.



#### 6th Centuri

Gained popularity in France and England. The early colonists took it to America and often called it the "Food of Kings.



The arrival of trains to Evesham in 1866 opened new markets to the growers from Badsey and surrounding areas.



The auctions at the Fleece Inn, Bretforton, were well under way, while elsewhere asparagus cultivation declined.



The media start promoting the festival as 'The British Asparagus Festival'



The rise of supermarkets with year-round availability of asparagus is matched by an interest in seasonal local food and the British Asparagus Festival around the Vale of Evesham.



The Romans prized asparagus for its medicinal properties.



Brought over to London from France, varieties of Battersea asparagus' started appearing in Evesham.



Large quantities of asparagus were grown around Evesham with 240 acres in Bretforton alone.



The Vale Asparagus Festival was born attracting lots of media attention.



Vale of Evesham Asparagus is given Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status.

# It's protected!

The delicacy of Vale of Evesham Asparagus has supreme culinary status. It was awarded European protects food name status in 2015.



Protected geographical indication (PGI) status emphasises the relationship between the specific geographic region and the name of the product. It demonstrates when a particular quality, reputation or other characteristic is specific to its geographical origin.

This puts Vale of Evesham Asparagus into an elite group of foods and drinks which include Champagne, Cognac, Roquefort, Parmesan and Jersey Royal Potatoes.

The flavour and texture of Vale of Evesham Asparagus is driven by the growing conditions, a unique micro-climate and soil environment in the Vale of Evesham alongside the local knowledge and experience of how best to grow the product.

# Some of the specifications Vale of Evesham Asparagus meets include.

- It is produced only between St George's Day and Midsummers Day
- It is within a specifically defined geographical area
- The colour can vary from light green to dark green, with purple tips depending on the speed of growth and night-time temperatures
- It is within certain curvature and seeding tolerances
- It is within certain dimensions
- It is sold either in a banded bundle, a flow wrapped pack or a plastic sleeve for supermarkets and naked in bundles for farm shops.
- Comprehensive records are kept by suppliers and growers relating to crown origin, crown delivery and method of production.
- \*All products using the name 'Vale of Evesham Asparagus' and using the PGI logo have to conform to the specification.

# Where to buy

The best way to get your hands on Vale of Evesham Asparagus is to purchase it from one of the numerous farm shops and independent food stores in the district. Vale of Evesham Asparagus is most prominent between April and June but it's not uncommon to see it sold just outside this prime window.

In addition to buying the vegetable loose, there are many tasty creations produced locally inspired by the green 'gras', including pork pies, sausages and preserves. Don't knock them until you've tried them!

Below is a selection of local establishments where it's possible to buy the freshest vegetables and associated products.

For more restaurants and recipes, visit our website:

www.britishasparagusfestival.co.uk

# **Asparagus sellers**

#### Birlingham Nurseries

Upper End, Birlingham, Nr Pershore, WR10 3AA

Local asparagus

#### Broadway Deli

29 High Street, Broadway, WR12 7DP

🕋 01386 853040 | 🖂 info@broadwaydeli.co.uk

www.broadwaydeli.co.uk

Local asparagus

#### Castle Nurseries Farm Shop

Leelands, Broadway Road, Evesham, WR11 7RN

ff castlenurseriesfarmshop

Local asparagus

#### Clive's Of Cropthorne

Clive's Of Cropthorne, The Heath, Cropthorne, WR10 3NE

- **1** 01386 860439
- ☑ rich@clivesfruitfarm.co.uk
- f Clive's Of Cropthorne

Home-grown asparagus

#### Chadbury Farm Shop & Café

Worcester Rd, Evesham, WR11 4TD

- **a** 01386 446705
- ☑ info@chadburyfarmshopandcafe.co.uk
- www.chadburyfarmshopandcafe.co.uk

#### Local asparagus

#### Ellenden Farm Shop

Evesham Rd, Evesham, WR11 8LU

- www.ellendenfarmshop.co.uk

#### Local asparagus

#### Fruit Salad – Greengrocer

46 High St, Pershore, WR10 1DP

**a** 01386 552148

#### Local asparagus

### Hampton Farm Shop

Pershore Rd, Evesham, WR11 2NB

www.hamptonfarmshop.com

#### Local asparagus

#### K & J Mason & Daughters - Greengrocer

Pershore Retail Market, Pershore, WR10 1EY

**a** 01386 555805

ff Ken & Jen Mason and daughters

Local asparagus



#### Mill Lane Nursery

Mill Lane, Drakes Broughton, Pershore, WR10 2AF

- 01905 841650 | If millanenursery
- www.milllanenursery.co.ukAsparagus seedling packs

#### Round of Gras

Bretforton Road, Badsey, WR11 7XQ

- **1** 01386 830206
- www.roundofgras.co.uk

Fresh asparagus, asparagus menu, takeaway, deliveries

# Asparagus / associated product sellers

#### **Abbey Butchers**

10 High Street, Pershore, WR10 1BG

- ff abbeybutchers.pershore

Asparagus pork pies, sausages and quiche

#### Café Craycombe

Craycombe Farm, Evesham Rd, Fladbury, Pershore, WR10 2QS

**1** 01386 860732

Menus featuring local asparagus

#### Delicious Café-Deli-Bistro

2 Vine St, Evesham WR11 4RE

- **1** 01386 48337
- f @deliciousbistro
- delicious-café.co.uk

Menus featuring local asparagus







#### Feli's Bar & Restaurant

Hawbridge, Stoulton, Worcester, WR7 4RJ

🕋 01905 840647 | 🖂 bookings@felisrestaurant.com

www.felisrestaurant.com

Our menu offers variety of dishes featuring local asparagus

#### Hussingtree Gin

Hussingtree Blends Ltd, Tythe Barn, Martin Hussingtree, Worcs, WR3 8TQ

6 07846 178484 | ✓ tipple@hussingtreegin.co.uk

www.hussingtreegin.co.uk

Asparagus Gin

#### Jelly Pickle Jam

16, Vine Mews, Evesham WR11 4RE

07939 346623 | II @jellypicklejam

@jellypicklejam

jellypicklejam.co.uk

Menus featuring local asparagus

#### Raphael's Restaurant (Hampton Ferry)

Hampton Ferry, Boat Lane, Evesham, WR11 4BP

**1** 01386 45460

www.hamptonferry.co.uk/restaurant.html

Menus showcase fresh local asparagus when in season

#### Revills Farm Shop

Bourne Road, Defford, WR8 9BS

- www.revillsfarmshop.co.uk

Revills famous homegrown asparagus lunches. Asparagus sold by the round in the shop fresh from the field. We can supply to the trade also. (collection prices only)

#### The Fleece Inn

The Cross, Bretforton, Nr Evesham, WR11 7JE

- www.thefleeceinn.co.uk

Serving asparagus menus and fresh asparagus; home of the famous Asparagus auctions and Asparagus Eating Competition

#### The Queen Elizabeth Inn

Main Street, Elmley Castle, Nr Pershore, WR10 3HS

- www.elmleycastle.com

Menus showcase local fresh asparagus when in season. Takeaways available

#### The Royal Oak

5 Vine St, Evesham WR11 4RE

- 裔 01386 442465 | <mark>II</mark> @ theroyaloakevesham
- theroyaloakevesham.com

Menus featuring local asparagus

#### Wayside Farm Shop and Tearoom

50 Pitchers Hill, Wickhamford, Evesham WR11 7RT

- www.waysidefarmshop.com

Fresh asparagus, asparagus sausages, quiche, scone, jam and cakes

# **Local Growers**

#### Clive's Of Cropthorne

The Heath, Cropthorne, WR10 3NE

- **a** 01386 860439
- ⊠ rich@clivesfruitfarm.co.uk
- Clive's Of Cropthorne

Clive's Of Cropthorne is a farm shop, butchery & farm restaurant, selling local produce



as well as homegrown produce from our farms. We grow, strawberries, raspberries, cherries and plums on our other farm, but here at Cropthorne we grow pumpkins, asparagus and apples.

This year we have a delicious asparagus dish on our menu in our farm restaurant.

Homegrown asparagus, wilted spinach and freerange poached egg, served on local sourdough with homemade hollandaise sauce!

#### **Red Star Growers Ltd**

Woodfield Farm, Birlingham, Pershore, WR10 3AG

- 01386 750670 | 
   □ enquiry@redstargrowers.co.uk
- www.redstargrowers.co.uk

Red Star Growers specialise in the growing and packing of produce. They grow their produce locally which includes: asparagus, green beans, spring onions, courgettes, tenderstem broccoli, carrots, beetroot and cabbage.

#### Springhill Farms (Pershore) Ltd t/as EVG Europe

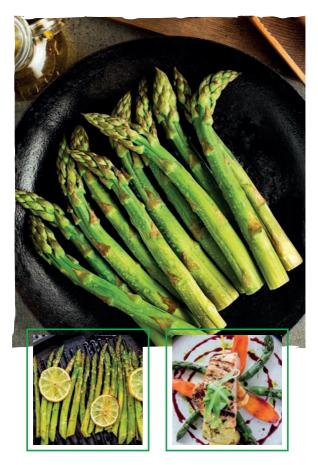
Birmingham Road, Blackminster, Evesham, WR11 7TD

- www.evgltd.co.uk

A family-owned enterprise covering 4500 acres of tomatoes, spring onions, asparagus, and combinable crops in and around the Vale of Evesham. They grow, pack, and market produce to major UK retailers, wholesale markets, and local farm shops, all whilst trying to produce great tasting British produce, as sustainably as possible.

# How to cook it

People tend to have their favourite method for cooking asparagus, and for most people that method is steaming. Why not try one of the methods below and find a tasty new way to prepare these green delicacies once known as the food of Kings.



No matter how you cook asparagus, you'll want to start off by either trimming the asparagus or peel the asparagus stalks before cooking!

# How to...



# **Blanch Asparagus**

Blanching, or briefly submerging vegetables in boiling salted water, can be a wonderful way to cook asparagus. By cooking asparagus quickly in truly boiling water and then fully chilling it in ice water, you can "set" the green colour.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, drop asparagus in and cook until just tender, anywhere from 1 to 4 minutes depending on thickness. Drain and put asparagus in ice water until fully cool. Remove asparagus from ice water and pat dry. Then they are ready for service.

# **Grill Asparagus**

Grilling asparagus is a great way to preserve its grassy flavour - and introduce a smoky edge in the process.

Simply toss trimmed or peeled asparagus spears with a bit of vegetable oil and put them on a hot grill. Cook, turning to brown evenly, until tender, about 10 minutes total. Sprinkle with salt and/or lemon juice and serve hot or at room temperature.

# **Microwave Asparagus**

Microwaving asparagus cooks them in a similar way to steaming.

Set asparagus in a microwave-safe baking dish, add 2 tablespoons of water, cover, and microwave on high setting until tender, which should take about 2 to 3 minutes. Leave standing and covered for about 3 minutes and they will be ready to eat.

# **Pan-Roast Asparagus**

Pan roasting is a combination of steaming and sautéing and gives you the browned edges of grilled or roasted asparagus without the hassle of heating up a grill or oven.

Heat some cooking oil or butter in a large frying pan over high heat. Add asparagus, cover, and cook, shaking the pan now and again, until asparagus is browned and tender, should take about 10 minutes.



# **Roast Asparagus**

Put asparagus in an oven proof dish and cook until tender. Just add a little cooking oil to the asparagus to keep it from drying out in the oven. Sprinkle with salt and maybe a squirt of lemon juice before serving and enjoy.

# Sauté Asparagus

Cooking asparagus over high heat while stirring often leads to tender, bright green bites. This method works best with asparagus that has first been cut into 1 to 2 inch lengths.

Heat a large frying pan over a high heat, add cooking oil or butter and asparagus and cook, stirring, until the asparagus is tender, usually taking about 5 minutes depending on how thick the spears are.

### **Steam Asparagus**

Asparagus is usually steamed as whole stalks, but it can be steamed cut into bite-size pieces, if you like. Whether you steam it whole or chopped, place asparagus in a steamer rack and set over boiling water.

Cover and cook until asparagus is tender, 4 to 8 minutes depending on the thickness of the asparagus stalks.

### **Stir-Fry Asparagus**

Stir-frying brings out the nutty edge of asparagus' grassy flavour.

Cut asparagus into 1 to 2 inch lengths. Heat a wok or large frying pan over a high heat, add cooking oil and when it is hot enough to shimmer toss in the asparagus. Cook, stirring pretty much constantly until asparagus is tender and browned on the edges, 3 to 5 minutes depending on thickness of asparagus.

If you want to include garlic, green onions, ginger, or other aromatics, add them right before adding the asparagus and let them sizzle for just a minute before tossing in the asparagus.



# **Recipes**

The versatility of asparagus makes it a wonderful ingredient to work with. The variety of methods to cook it, discussed previously, is evidence that it can be enjoyed in multiple ways.



There are an abundance of recipes incorporating asparagus to choose from, so there's no excuse not to purchase the local delicacy and produce a quick and easy healthy meal for all the family to enjoy.



Over the next few pages are some classic recipes from businesses closely associated with the British Asparagus Festival for you to try at home.

Visit www.britishasparagus.com/#cook to find recipes allowing you to eat asparagus in a different way every day of the 8 week season!

### Gus says...

Why not try asparagus with hollandaise sauce for a tasty starter.

Why not try asparagus with smoked salmon for a succulent main course...

# **Revills' Asparagus "Twiglets"**

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 round of Revills' homegrown fresh asparagus
- 4 sheets of filo pastry
- Melted butter
- 1 tbsp poppy seeds
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 tbsp garlic mayonnaise or your favourite dip

#### Method

- 1. Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas 4
- 2. Clean and trim asparagus.
- Cut the filo pastry into squares, slightly shorter than the length of the asparagus spears.
- 4. Brush each filo square with melted butter
- **5.** Roll each asparagus spear in a square of pastry.
- Place the asparagus spears on a baking sheet and brush with more melted butter.
- Sprinkle half the asparagus spears with poppy seeds and the other half with sesame seeds.
- 8. Bake for 10-15 mins until golden brown.
- **9.** Remove from oven, cool slightly and serve with mayonnaise or dip.



# Salad of Birlingham asparagus with deep fried poached egg and balsamic vinegar

#### Ingredients

7 spears of asparagus

1 poached egg (trimmed)

1 peeled potato (Maris Piper)

Butter

Salt

Oil for deep frying

Aged balsamic vinegar

Red vein sorrell



#### Method

- **1.** Poach asparagus in boiling water, salt and butter for 4 minutes.
- 2. Place the asparagus on a plate.
- Wrap the poached egg in strips of potato and deep fry.
- **4.** Season the deep-fried egg and place on top of the asparagus.
- 5. Drizzle with 12-year-old balsamic vinegar.
- 6. Garnish with red vein sorrel.

# Asparagus soup simple and seasonal

Perfect to make when asparagus is in season in the spring. It's easy to make, tastes delicious and can be served hot or cold. Serves: 2

#### **Ingredients**

250ml milk

250ml cream (double)

2 shallots, finely chopped

2 sticks of celery, chopped

1 leek, chopped

1 medium potato, grated

1 garlic clove

1 round of fresh asparagus, shredded

#### Salt and pepper

#### Method

- Boil milk, cream, and potato until it's soft then add the asparagus for the last 2 minutes. Stir occasionally so it doesn't catch, then add salt and pepper.
- In a separate pan, sauté off shallots, celery, leek and garlic once they are cooked, add to the other pan.
- Once all ingredients are cooked and soft, blend until smooth and adjust seasoning, add a squeeze of lemon juice if desired.
- 4. To serve; re-heat gently for 3 4 minutes and serve hot in warmed soup bowls or serve chilled.
- Garnish with diced cooked pancetta or crème fraiche and some cooked asparagus and serve with warm crusty bread.

A super quick and easy dish for those mid-week meals that requires little preparation time.

Serves: 4 | Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 15-20 minutes

#### **Ingredients**

400g asparagus
170g frozen peas
350g pappardelle pasta
2 knobs of butter
1 tbsp olive oil
4 echalions, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
200ml crème fraiche
Handful of chopped mint
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Parmesan, grated



- 1. Put a large pan of water onto boil for the pappardelle. While you wait, trim the ends off the asparagus and chop into 2-3cm pieces.
- Once the water has come up to boil, blanch the asparagus and the peas for 2-3 minutes and then place in a bowl of ice-cold water.
- **3.** Keep the pan of water on the hob and boil the pasta according to pack instructions.
- **4.** Meanwhile, melt the butter in a frying pan, then add the olive oil, shallots and garlic and gently fry for 5 minutes until soft.
- **5.** Add the crème fraiche to the pan and stir to gently warm through making sure it doesn't split.
- **6.** Add the fresh chopped mint, asparagus and peas to the pan and stir through along with a little of pasta water to loosen the mixture up.
- 7. Once the pasta is cooked, drain well and add to the sauce. Season to your liking and then serve with a grating of parmesan, a sprinkle of more fresh mint and a drizzle of olive oil.

# Asparagus themed events 2023





Sunday 23 April

#### Great English Asparagus Run

The Fleece Inn, Bretforton.

Celebrating not only St George's Day, National Asparagus Day but also the start of the English Asparagus season in the Vale of Evesham.

www.britishasparagusfestival.co.uk

Saturday 29 April - Monday 1 May

# The Vale of Evesham Food & Drink Festival

Crown Meadow, Evesham.

A festival celebrating local produce with a particular focus on Vale of Evesham asparagus. www.eveshamfoodfestival.co.uk

Sunday 28 May and Sunday 4 June

#### The Famous Fleece Asparagus Auction

The Fleece Inn, Bretforton. Enjoy Bretforton Silver Band and bid for the season's largest, freshest and greenest asparagus.



# Asparamancer Predictions for 2023



- The Lionesses will bring the Women's World Cup home, and Sarina Wiegman will be awarded an honorary Damehood.
- 2. Gareth Southgate will receive an award in His Majesty's New Years Honours.
- The Government will hang on but will be under ever increasing pressure to grip the economy. Further devaluation of the pound will not be acceptable.
- People will become more savvy with food shortages on the horizon. Rationing may be considered.
- Following on from this people will return to growing their own foods. Gardens will be dug over and allotments will be even more popular.
- **6.** Agricultural labour will soar amongst the unemployed.
- 7. The Winter of Discontent amongst Unions will try the public's patience and sympathy. It will cause unrest between the haves and have nots.

- The Kings Coronation will be a joyous occasion for all those participating. A bright spot in a dark time.
- Turmoil in the Far East as result of super plague Covid. Tensions between countries will be highlighted.
- 11. There will be a removal of royal titles.
- 12. The Princess Royal will have a health scare which will show the public just what a hard working and dedicated member of the Royal Family she is and not to be taken for granted.
- **13.** Concerns over Climate Changes will be to the forefront once more.
- **14.** There will be unexpected deaths amongst Showbiz personalities. Not all age related.
- **15.** Certain high profile political public figures not MPs will be revealed as corrupt.
- **16.** More Hollywood A listers will come out as gay. This will be quite shocking to the public in general "Who knew"!
- 17. Chelsea FC will go from strength to strength.
- 18. RUFC clubs will continue to struggle with more going into receivership. A possible return to player status being "semi Pro" may have to be considered by some.
- 19. Educational reforms will again be at the forefront especially with University students who are not receiving the support they're due.
- 20. UK will not return to the EU.

Finally, the Asparamancer predicts
Vale of Evesham Asparagus
will continue to be grown and
harvested and will still be
considered the finest in the World.

