

Common Name: **Asparagus**

Genus: *Asparagus*

Species: *officinalis*

Family: Asparagacea

AKA: Herba Sparagiagrestis, Sperage, Garden Sperage, Sparrow Grass



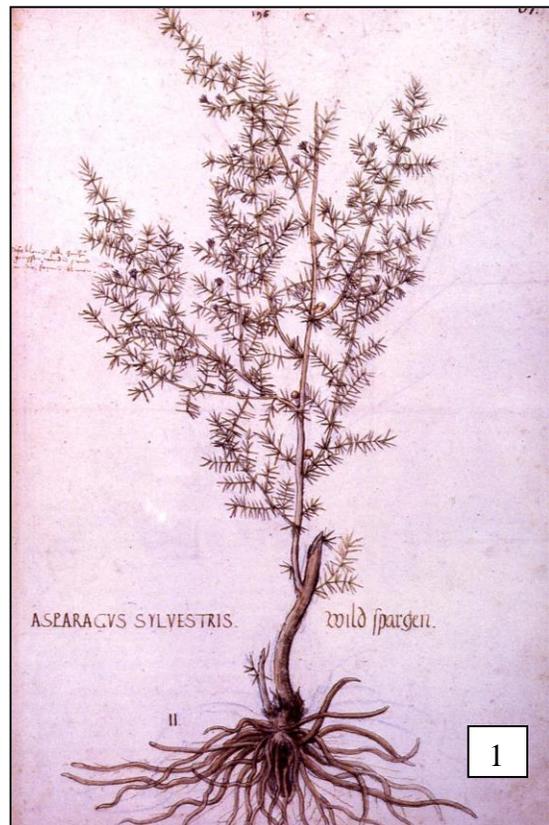
## Historical Uses:

### Medical:

“For pain or swelling of the bladder, take the roots of the plant that is called sparagiagrestis or asparagus, simmer it down in water by three-fourths, then drink it for seven days on an empty stomach. Baths should be taken for many days-the patient is not to get in or drink cold water-and he will feel healthy in a wonderful way. For toothache, take the juice of this same plant, give it to drink and hold it in the mouth. For sore veins, take the roots of this same plant pounded with wine and give them to drink. It helps.”(1)

“The small stalke whereof being sod and eaten doth mollifie the belly and provoke urine. But the decoction of the roots being dranck doth help the Dysureticall, Ictericall, Nephriticall, and Ischiadicall, as also such as are bitten of ye Phalanx, being sod in wine such are troubled with the toothache, the decoction being kept on the pained tooth. And the seed also being dranck is good for the same effects. They also say that dogs drinking ye decoction of them will dye.” (2)

“The young buds or branches, boiled in ordinary broth, make the belly soluble and open; and boiled in white wine, provoke urine, being stopped, and is good against stranguary or difficulty of making water; it expelleth the gravel and stone out of the kidneys, and helpeth pains in the reins. And boiled in wine or vinegar, it is prevalent for them that have their arteries loosened, or are troubled with the hip-gout or sciatica. The decoction of the roots boiled in wine and taken, is good to clear the sight, and being held in the mouth easeth the tooth-ach; and being taken fasting several mornings together, stirreth up bodily lust in man and woman.”(3)



“They somewhat provoke urine, are good for the kidnies and bladder, but they yield unto the body little nourishment, the same moist, yet not faultie: they are thought to increase seed, and stir up lust.”(4)

**Culinary:** “The first sprouts or naked tender shoots hereof be oftentimes sodded in flesh broth and eaten, or boyled in faire water, and seasoned with oyle, vinegar, salt, and paper, then are served at mens tables for a salad; they are pleasant to the taste, easily concocted, and loose the belly.”(5)

**Folklore/Astrology:** “Under the domain of Juniper.(6)“ If any ill-meaning person enchants another out of spite, take the dried root of this same plant, and give them to eat with well water, and sprinkle the person with water. The person will be freed from the enchantment.”(7)

“In the Doctrine of Signatures, wherein plants bore the sign of what they were used for, Asparagus was associated with human hair. Powdered ram’s horn would grow into Asparagus, a tale Dioscorides did not believe.”(8)

**Other:** Old English name: *Wuduceruille*.(9) Well known to the Romans by 200 B.C., favorite vegetable of Augustus Ceasar.(10)

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**Contemporary Uses:** The following items are taken from Bown.(11)

**Parts Used:** Young shoots, rhizomes

**Medicinal:** “Internally for cystitis, pyelitis, kidney disease, rheumatism, gout, and edema from heart failure. Asparagusic acid is used to treat schistosomiasis.

**Culinary:** “Spears are steamed and served hot or cold as a vegetable, and pureed or finely chopped in soups.”

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**Area of Origin:** Western Europe to Siberia

**Physical description:** “A bitter, restorative, cleansing herb that acts on the bowels, liver, and kidneys. It contains asparagusic acid which is nematocidal.”

**Plant type:** “Perennial with creeping rhizomes and upright stems. Dense, soft needle-like foliage.”

**Form:** Upright

**Height:** 3 to 5 feet

**Flower color:** Greenish white, bell shaped

**Flowering period:** Summer

**Soil type/requirements:** Rich, light, well-drained soil

**Hardiness zone:** USDA zone 2-9

**Sun requirements:** Full sun to semi shade

**Propagation:** By seed in spring, by division in early spring

**Cautions:** Berries may be harmful if eaten

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## Sources

1. Ardsall, pg. 186
2. Dioscorides, Bk. 2, 152.

3. Culpeper, pg. 4-5.
4. Gerard, pg. 1111-1112
5. Ibid.
6. Culpeper, pg. 4-5.
7. Ardsall, pg. 186
8. Anderson, pg. 44-45
9. Ardsall, pg. 186
10. Anderson, pg. 44-45
11. Bown, pg. 135

**Illustrations/Images:**

1. Albertus Meyer      1542