

Janice Feuer Haugen, chef, food blogger, culinary coach and teacher. Author of five cookbooks including *Fruit-Sweet & Sugar-Free* and *Chocolate Decadence*. She shares her recipes and tips for living everyday healthy, everyday delicious in cooking classes and in her blog: [EverydayHealthyEverydayDelicious.com](http://EverydayHealthyEverydayDelicious.com).



## Get Ready for... **FRESH ASPARAGUS**

NATURALLY DELICIOUS RECIPES • Janice Feuer-Haugen

### *Asparagus Ribbon Salad with Almonds & Pecorino*

*"You know, when you get your first asparagus, or your first acorn squash, or your first really good tomato of the season, those are the moments that define the cook's year. I get more excited by that than anything else." —MARIO BATALI*

**W**ith spring right around the corner, we'll soon enjoy our first taste of asparagus. While it's not the source of spring fever, those first spears of asparagus are definitely an excellent cure with their deep green color, bright, clean and earthy taste, tender texture and nutrient-rich profile.

An almost leafless member of the lily family, asparagus is in the ground for three years before it can be harvested. And, then, it grows so quickly that some people say if you lie on the ground you can actually watch asparagus grow.

In ancient times harvesting wild asparagus, famous for its medicinal qualities, was a springtime ritual. Today it is prized as a nutrient-packed culinary delicacy. Just 5 stalks of asparagus are an excellent source of folate and vitamins K, C and A. Asparagus is naturally low in calories and sodium, and high in fiber. It is also a very good source of vitamins B1, B2, B3 and B6. And, surprisingly, 100 grams of asparagus contains nearly 3 grams of protein.

#### **Thick or Thin Asparagus?**

- Thin asparagus is not "baby" asparagus. The size of a spear doesn't increase as it grows taller.
- Thicker asparagus spears come from the crown



(or root bed) of younger, more vigorous plants.

- There's also no real connection between the size of asparagus stalks and their tenderness.
  - ~ Thicker asparagus has the more fibrous peel. Many cooks use a vegetable peeler to remove much of it before cooking in order to enjoy the tender inside.
  - ~ The peel of thin asparagus is less fibrous. But with so little tender center to peel ratio, thin asparagus can seem tough.
- Thick asparagus is great for grilling, roasting, quick steaming and poaching.
- Enjoy quick-cooking thin asparagus roasted, in stir-fries, frittatas and quiches.

However you choose to enjoy asparagus, buy the freshest spears you can find.

- Look for tightly closed tips (flower buds) and check the bottom end for moistness.
- If they are opening, showing signs of spoilage, or the bottoms are very dry, the asparagus is past its prime and you'd do well to pass it by.

## Fresher Longer

Did you know that the white, woody and tough bottom part of the asparagus, the part we snap off, helps contain the moisture necessary to keep the spear fresh?

Once you get the asparagus home, the best way to keep it fresh longer is to trim off a bit of the bottom of each spear. Then place the unwashed asparagus in a glass with the stems sitting in a few inches of water. Enclose the asparagus and glass in a plastic bag. When you're ready to use the asparagus, wash it and break off the stems at their first natural breaking point closest to the bottom before proceeding with your recipe.



Serves 3-4  
as an entrée salad

1/3 cup slivered almonds  
1 pound fresh asparagus  
Juice of 1 lemon  
4 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
Coarse sea salt  
Freshly ground pepper  
Rounded 1/2 cup grated or shaved Pecorino Romano or Parmesan cheese

- 1) Toast the slivered almonds in a 350 degree oven until golden brown, about 7 minutes.
- 2) Wash the asparagus and dry it well. Do not snap off the ends of the asparagus spears, as they become the perfect handle.
- 3) Use a "Y" peeler if you have one to easily shave the asparagus ribbons. Other sharp peelers will work. Though, place each spear in line with the edge of your cutting board so the peeler can go low enough to shave the most from each spear.



## Asparagus Ribbon Salad with Almonds & Pecorino

Fresh, uncooked ribbons of asparagus allow its delicate, woody flavor to shine. When paired with fresh lemon juice, good olive oil, sheep milk's Pecorino cheese and toasted almonds you have a healthy and unique salad for celebrating asparagus at the beginning, middle and end of its short season. The first time we ate this salad, my husband commented that this just might be his new favorite way to enjoy asparagus.

- 4) Divide the spears into three approximately equal groups. Holding on to the bottom end of a spear lightly draw the peeler all the way from the bottom through the tip. Save the remaining "handle" for another use.
- 5) When you have completed 1/3 of the asparagus, scatter the asparagus ribbons on a platter. Drizzle on 1/3 of the lemon juice and 1/3 of the olive oil. Sprinkle with a little coarse salt and freshly ground pepper, 1/3 of the almonds and 1/3 of the cheese.
- 6) Repeat this twice more with each of the remaining two groups of asparagus.
- 7) Let the salad sit for about 15 minutes before serving. This allows for the flavors to marry and the asparagus to slightly soften. ■

### Janice's Cooking Classes

will resume in **Spring 2016** • For info, visit

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