

### WHITE ASPARAGUS

Commonly known as *Spargel*, this spring vegetable is available in Germany from the beginning of March to the end of June. What is the difference between white and green asparagus? White asparagus is grown underground, covered in mounded dirt and plastic foil so that they are not exposed to sunlight. Without sunlight, they cannot produce chlorophyll, which turns them green.

### GROWING SPARGEL

This sensitive plant needs a lot of attention throughout the year. Once the harvest is over, it goes into uncontrollable growth. That's the time for a soil evaluation, to find out which of the nutrients need to be restored. An average asparagus plant remains in the earth for about ten years. The asparagus frond shrivels in autumn and stays on the field as humus. The dirt mounds are newly drawn in spring. To achieve an optimal temperature in the mounds, plastic foils are used to cover them. Black foil warms up the earth when outside temperatures are cold, and white foil cools it down in high temperatures.

### HARVESTING SPARGEL

When the ground temperature is right (the night temperature should not be below 10°C prior to the first prodding), that's when things get going. *Spargel* is transported to the farm shortly after prodding, and dipped into a waterbath for pre-cooling and pre-cleaning. The energy potential of the stems is enormous - without cooling, the internal temperature can rise to as high as 30°C, whereby all vitamins and nutrients are lost. *Spargel* is then cleaned and sorted into four sizes: small, standard, large, and jumbo. Then another dip in a waterbath to cool them down to 2°C. After a brief stay in a refrigerated warehouse (one day at the most), the *Spargel* sets off on its journey to the customers.

### SELECTING AND STORING SPARGEL

Fresh *Spargel* stalks are firm, straight and smooth. The tips should be tightly closed and compact and not starting to spread out or sprout. Often, you will see *Spargel* standing in a bin filled with a small amount of water or lined with a damp pad which keeps the base of the stems from drying out. When storing *Spargel*, keep only the bottoms of the stems moist. Do not wash *Spargel* before storing and never soak it. Before placing in the fridge, trim 1-cm from the ends and them upright in a jar or glass with 2-3cm of cold water in it. Cover with a plastic bag and refrigerate for 3-4 days. To prolong freshness, wrap the cut ends with a wet paper towel, place in a loose-fitting plastic bag, and store in the vegetable drawer of the refrigerator.