

EXOTIC EDIBLES

INCLUDING KIWI, ASPARAGUS, FIG, PAW PAW AND PERSIMMON

HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



HARDY KIWI

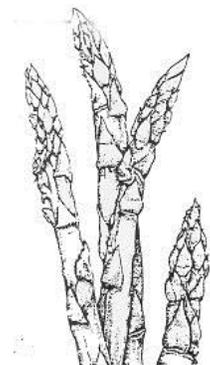
The fruits of the hardy kiwis (*Actinidia arguta* and *A. kolomitka*) are smaller but reasonable facsimiles of the fuzzy, green-fleshed ones in supermarkets (*A. deliciosa*). The smooth-skinned, sweeter fruits of hardy kiwi are about the size of a large grape and can be eaten skin and all. With the exception of 'Issai', which is self-fruitful, both male and female plants are required to produce fruit. The vigorous vines require support and regular pruning to control their size. They are relatively free from insect and disease problems.



Although best planted in full sun in rich well drained soil, the variety 'Arctic Beauty' will tolerate some shade. Depending on growing conditions, these vines will bear fruit in 3 – 5 years and have a life expectancy of up to 60 years. A mature vine is capable of producing up to 50 kg of fruit per year.

Pruning is carried out in the dormant spring season. Trim back all branches that have fruited and any living non-fruited shoots to about 50 cm from the branching point. Neglected vines can be cut back severely. For a tidier plant and fewer but larger fruits, you can train and prune a kiwi in a manner similar to grapes (for more information see our 'Green Thumb Guide' to Berries GT 238). Fruit is borne near the base of the current season's new shoots.

ASPARAGUS



Asparagus is an easy-to-grow, perennial vegetable which, once established, will produce year after year from early spring through early summer. A mature plant will produce 1 – 2 kg of spears. You will need 20-30 plants to yield enough asparagus for a family of four.

Plant in a sunny location in deep, well drained, sandy loam soil. Large amounts of organic material such as humus, peat moss or manure should be worked into the soil to a depth of 30 to 40 cm.

Dig the rows 50 cm wide, and 60 cm apart. Remove and set aside the top 15 cm of soil. Fork and dig the bottom of the trench to a depth of 30 cm and incorporate an 18 kg bag of composted manure for each metre of row. Rake out the sunken improved beds and let them settle. Plant the asparagus crowns 60 cm apart. Settle each one on the bottom of the trench. Cover with 5 cm of soil from the bank and firm gently over the plants.

As soon as the new purplish tips grow through the soil, cover them again. Repeat this procedure each time shoots reappear, until the trench is filled. The finished beds should be slightly higher than the adjoining ground, for they will settle further still.

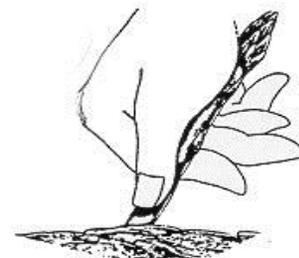


Do not harvest asparagus in first year!

In spring, remove old mulch and debris as soon as possible. Top-dress with fertilizer or manure and follow, later on, with a side-dressing. You can take a light harvest this second year without harming the bed's productivity in later years. Take spears 10 – 20 cm long and 1 – 2 cm thick, for about two weeks; then let the stalks grow. Mulch the bed as before and keep it weeded. In the third year you can pick for four or six weeks and in subsequent years stretch the season to eight. To harvest, snap the spears off close to the ground by hand (see illustration below).

As the summer progresses, the spears will grow into tall, feathery ferns, which should be left to grow. Like those of all herbaceous perennials, the asparagus leaves are producing energies for next year's growth. (Incidentally, the fronds will bear flowers in summer, and later the female plants will set small berries). Don't cut the stalks down until they brown and ripen off naturally in the fall. They don't need to be removed until spring if the bed is pest-free. In areas where asparagus must be irrigated, withhold water in the fall and let the crowns die back.

Permit the top growth, or 'fern' to grow throughout the summer. In the fall when it has yellowed, cut it to the ground. Fertilize in fall with bone meal and provide winter protection with a mulch of clean straw.



Harvesting a spear

PERSIMMON

Lusciously sweet and mildly spicy, persimmons belong to the genus *Diospyros*, which translates into 'food of the gods'.

The native American Persimmon (*D. virginiana*) grows slowly to 6 – 10 m and is hardy to Zone 5. It is an excellent small ornamental tree for landscape use or a natural wildlife garden. The prolific late-ripening fruits dangle decoratively along bare branches well into winter and are irresistible to many birds and animals.

Plant in full sun in rich well drained soil. Male and female plants are required to ensure pollination although seedless varieties are self-fruitful. The sweet fruit is about the size of a large cherry tomato up to 5 cm in diameter. Trees usually bear fruit two to five years after planting and are relatively pest free.



Oriental Persimmons (*D. kaki*) are self-fruitful but less hardy than the American species. The fruit is much larger, about the size of a large peach.

PAW PAW

The Paw Paw Tree (*Asimina triloba*) or 'Hoosier Banana' has a lush tropical look, though it is native and hardy to Zone 5. The trees grow about 5 metres tall and have huge, drooping leaves 30 cm long.

The plump, sausage-shaped fruits ripen, look and taste like bananas with a creamier texture like a thick pudding. The fruit is highly relished by humans and animals alike.

Paw Paws prefer rich, deep, moist soil and require cross pollination. Plant two varieties for fruit production – usually 2 to 3 years after planting. Fruit is produced on previous season's growth, and ripens in mid to late October. An annual application of a high phosphorus fertilizer improves fruit production. Paw Paws are relatively pest free.



FIGS

Figs are not hardy in Ontario and must be wintered indoors. They are best grown in large heavy plastic containers that can be sunk into the garden or placed on a sunny patio or deck. This facilitates moving the plant indoors and also restricts the roots which increases fruit production.

In our climate, with the plant safely over-wintered indoors, two crops are possible. Young fruit are set in the fall, develop the following spring and ripen in August and September. A second crop develops on new growth in summer and ripens in late fall if moved into a heated greenhouse. Once this second crop is removed, the plant can divert its energy to the setting of buds for next summer.

Figs will fruit heavier after a cool dormant period (40 – 50° F). The tree only requires light if it has leaves and, once dormant, can be kept in a cool dark basement. Avoid temperatures above 55° F. A two month dormancy period is best. Water sparingly at this time but do not let the soil dry out.

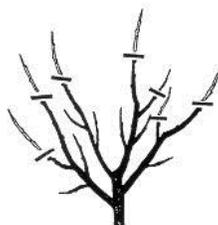


When a fig is ripe, the narrow neck softens and the fruit droops slightly, sometimes exuding a drop of nectar from the eye. Pick figs for canning just before ripeness but allow them to fully ripen if eating fresh. Figs intended for drying should be allowed to drop off the plant, then put on racks to dry in the sun.

Fertilize monthly with a balanced fertilizer such as 15-30-15 beginning in March when the plant is brought back to a sunny window and ending in July.

Water very sparingly during winter dormancy but keep moist in spring and summer. If the tree does not receive enough water in summer the leaves will turn yellow and drop off.

Pruning is not required for fruit production once a framework is established. Cut out old wood to encourage new shoots. Use a spade to behead any unwanted suckers, or dig them up and share them with friends.



On a young tree, cut back the leader of each branch to an outward-facing bud.



Framework is established

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