

ASPARAGUS CULTURE.

To judge from the fact that we receive more inquiries about Asparagus than almost any other vegetable, it seems that although the mysteries and secrets which were formerly considered necessary for its cultivation have long since been uncovered and proved to be detrimental rather than otherwise, there still clings to the popular mind some mysterious halo connected with the idea of Asparagus culture. And yet it necessitates less labour and expense than almost any other garden vegetable. The roots cost hardly more than the seeds for other vegetables occupying the same space, and the first expense is the only one. While Peas and Lettuce and the whole list of vegetables have to be sown every year, Asparagus yields its delicious crop year after year, without replanting, for generations.

The most frequent cause of failure with Asparagus is too close planting. Favorable soil and good roots are, of course, necessary to obtain good results, but these can amount to but little unless sufficient space is given for their development. A deep, light, sandy loam is best, but with proper preparation any garden soil can be made to produce a good crop. If so heavy and wet that water stands on the ground during winter, under-draining and deep working will be necessary before planting. On ordinary garden soil, deep plowing or spading and the working in of enough stable manure—a coating of four or five inches would not be too much, although less will do—is sufficient. If this can be done during the fall or winter previous to planting, so much the better. Where practicable, it is far better to plant the roots in long rows on one side of the garden than in short beds. A single row of one hundred and fifty or two

hundred plants, set eighteen inches or two feet apart, will give an ample supply for a family of half a dozen, and, during the height of the season, some to sell or give away to neighbors who are not so fortunate as to delight in an Asparagus-bed. When more than one row has to be planted, they should never be nearer together than three feet, and unless forced into very narrow limits, a distance of four feet is to be preferred.

After the rows are marked out and the line stretched, a ditch with one side slanting and about twelve inches deep is dug with a sharp spade. Against the smooth side of the ditch the plants are placed, and the roots spread out so that the crowns are four or five inches below the level of the ground. A handful of soil is then drawn over the roots and firmly packed down; more soil is then raked in, so as to fill the ditch to within two or three inches of the surface. In a few weeks the sprouts will appear; the ground has then to be loosened with a cultivator or a hoe, and kept mellow and clean during summer. At each cultivating some soil should be drawn into the remaining ditch, so as gradually to fill it entirely.

Often it becomes desirable to plant Asparagus without sufficient preparation having been given to the soil. In such cases, a trench may be dug eighteen inches deep and twelve or fifteen inches wide. Rich stable-manure is put into the trench and trodden down so as to fill it one-half. A layer of three inches of fine surface-soil is thrown on the manure and shaped into a ridge, with its highest point in the center of the ditch; on this ridge the roots are placed at the proper distances, the rootlets evenly spread out toward the sides and covered with about one inch of soil, which has to be