

takes one product, and every one favours it ; thus peas and potatoes are articles of universal consumption, whilst many retailers in poor districts will not touch spinach or artichokes, as they have no customers to appreciate them. This is merely given as an illustration of a predilection which exists for or against certain vegetables.

History and Cultivation

Asparagus, the plant under review, though indigenous to Great Britain, requires much care under cultivation.

At the commencement of the century it was considered quite a luxury, and reserved for feasts, and holidays. The consumption has increased of late years, and may be attributed to two reasons. The large consignment which have arrived from abroad is one reason, and the better condition of the middle and lower classes at home is another whilst both have tended in the direction of making what was a rarity an article of frequent appearance. Large quantities of forced asparagus are seen in the metropolitan and provincial markets, and though it has hardly the form or flavour of good home-grown *grass*, yet it has its place in commercial imports, and comes across the channel freely. Yet, notwithstanding wider popularity and an increased circle of admirers, asparagus is not considered an ordinary item in general use, and many thousands in this country have never seen the vegetable at table.

Its cultivation cannot be considered difficult, though some soils may be unsuitable for its production. Wet land, or land of a clayey character, would be unsuitable for that purpose, as the young shoots—the edible part—are fragile, and in making their way through the intermediate soil would become twisted and mishapen, unless the mould above the stools was tender and tilthy.

These are two ways which are followed in the cultivation of this vegetable, and both systems have their admirers and supporters. One plan is to adopt a series of alternate beds and alleys ; the other is to raise the crop on the flat, with a slight moulding to the rows for blanching.

Alternate Beds and Alleys

It is generally advised that there should be a liberal dressing of manure at the start, as beds once made remain for many years, and our ancestors suggested that a cartload of well-rotted farmyard dung should be applied to every perch

of ground. A rough suggestion of this sort conveys very little meaning to an exact mind, because carts vary so in size and capacity. If the land had a dressing of forty tons per acre, and only a part of the field is under crop, then there would be a larger amount of manure on the cultivated portion than appears at first sight. To explain more clearly, suppose the beds to be four feet wide, and the alleys two feet wide, then only then only two-thirds of the land would really benefit from the manure.

The seeds should be sown in a bed in the month of April ; then, when the young seedlings appear, they must be carefully weeded, and not allowed to be overthick on the ground. If the little plants come up too close together, the smaller ones should be extracted, to give ample scope that those remaining may stouten and become sturdy by the following March. By raising the plants in a seed-bed less ground is needed the first year and the second year the strongest plants can be selected, which is a great advantage.

In marking out the site of the plantation it is well to have the length of the beds equal, as more convenient for many purposes. Let them be of a comparatively short length, as when the crop has to be gathered it is generally carried out of the alley in handfuls to a flasket placed at the end, and to carry a long distance in this fashion is tedious. Great care is needed in transporting the fresh-cut asparagus to be shed or homestead for tying, as the shoots are spalt, and the buds easily break.

In setting out the yearling plants the ground must be lowered a trifle where the beds are to be and the space earth placed for the moment in the alleys, when the roots are carefully placed, the mould should be put back, so the ground will be about level the first year ; the second year more earth will be taken from the alleys, spaces, or paths and laid on the top, which he sometimes called *landing*, as the sides of the beds have to be banked up. Three rows should be planted on each bed, and the plants spaced about 15 in. apart.

Cultivation on the Flat

The cultivation of asparagus on the flat is often recommended to-day, and the wider the rows are placed apart the finer are the buds or shoots produced. If the distance of the rows is 3 or 4 feet asunder, then some other crop must be grown between the rows, so that the ground, though not