

Jersey Asparagus served in the Regency Style

Asparagus has been popular since the time of the Ancient Greeks (who ate the wild version) and the Romans, who prized it for its taste as well as its medicinal and aphrodisiac qualities. Popular in France, Louis XIV is rumoured to have built greenhouses just for the purpose of raising asparagus.

Asparagus has been known by many names over the years: in the 17th century it was referred to as 'sparrow grass' by the famous diarist Samuel Pepys, who described buying a 'hundred of sparrow grass' in Fenchurch Street, London in 1667.

As it has such a short season, we must make the most of it and enjoy it while it is at its very best. This simple recipe, which has been prepared by the 16 New Street Cook, Lindsey Noble, features in Hannah Glasse's 18th century cookbook, entitled 'The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Simple'.

You will need

- 1 large bunch of fresh Jersey asparagus
 - 1 slice of homemade bread
 - 50g (or more) of your favourite Jersey butter - salted or unsalted - melted
 - Kitchen string, for tying your bundles
1. Rinse the asparagus in cold water. Trim off the woody ends and try to make them all the same length. Scrape (or peel) the skin from the spears, about half way down. Tie the spears into small bundles with string; this will make them easier to remove from the pan.
 2. Bring a shallow, wide pan of salted water to the boil. Carefully lay your bundles of asparagus inside, placing them all in the same direction. Cook on a medium heat for 3-4 minutes: do not allow the water to boil furiously, or this will damage the tender tips.

Meanwhile, warm a serving plate in the oven and toast a slice of bread, removing the crusts if you wish.

3. When the spears are cooked, carefully lift them out of the water and drain on a flat dish or plate lined with a cloth. Cut the strings and serve the asparagus on a round of toasted bread, alongside another dish of melted butter.

Variation - Fresh Asparagus served with a Hen's Egg

For a more substantial meal, serve with a freshly poached hen's egg and some salt and pepper. To poach the egg, bring a pan of water to simmering point with a dash of white vinegar. Break your room temperature egg into a small cup or bowl, and gently lower the egg into the simmering water. Do not allow the water to boil, or the egg will break up. When the egg is cooked to your liking, remove it from the water with a slotted spoon and drain on kitchen paper. Serve on the bed of asparagus.

Delicious!

