

Absurdly Addictive Asparagus

Adapted by Our Young Chefs from Food52.com, KayKay, April 2010
Makes 4 servings

This creative combination of ingredients offers a variety of flavors and textures that will give you "snap, crackle, pop" in your mouth with every bite. Do not overcook the asparagus so that they are still crisp tender. If your family eats pork, substitute pancetta (pronounced pan tchet' a), an Italian salt-cured (not smoked) bacon, regular smoked pork bacon or ham, for the turkey bacon. Take time to properly wash/clean the leeks. There is always very fine sand deep in the layers because when leeks are grown, soil is piled up around them, so that more of the leek is hidden from the sun, and therefore lighter in color and more tender. The process that produces a beautiful leek with a long pale body, also results in sand and dirt lodged deep inside the leek.



INGREDIENTS

1 very large or 2 small leeks to yield
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups, $\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch sliced
crosswise (white and pale green
parts only)
Cool water



*Leeks --
the line on
the picture
indicates
about how
much of the
pale green
leaves to use*



*Agitate the sliced
leeks in a bowl of
cool water with
hands to dislodge
dirt or sand.*

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the leeks: Cut off the **root end** of each leek and the **top green part** about 2 inches above the **white part** (keep about 2 inches of **pale green leaves** above the **white part**). Slice the **leeks** in half lengthwise. Cut crosswise into $\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices to yield approximately $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups sliced leeks. (Save any additional **sliced leeks** for another use. Save/freeze the **green tops** of the leeks to be used at a later time for soup stock.)

Rinse the leeks: Place the **sliced leeks** into a bowl; fill with **cool water**. (If the leeks are especially dirty, rinse them first under **cool running water** in a colander, before placing in a bowl with **cool water**.) Use hands to agitate the **leeks**; this will dislodge any dirt or sand that may be clinging to them and allow it to drop to the bottom of the bowl. Allow the **leeks** to sit for a minute or so in the bowl of water, then scoop the **leeks** out of the **water** with hands, a sieve OR slotted spoon; place in a clean bowl. Set aside until later.

1 pound asparagus, woody ends
trimmed, sliced into 2 inch pieces
on the diagonal

Prepare the asparagus: Wash the **asparagus** under cool running water; pat dry. Snap off the **woody ends** of each **asparagus**; discard. Slice each **asparagus spear** into 2-inch lengths, cutting crosswise on a diagonal. Set aside.

2 cloves garlic

Prepare the flavoring ingredients: Prepare the **garlic** by one of three methods: finely dice with a knife, grate using a microplane zester OR pass through a garlic press. Set aside in a small bowl. 

Zest* of one lemon
1 teaspoon orange zest* from one orange

Lemon and orange: Wash the **lemon** and **orange** under cool running water with a **drop** of dish soap; rinse and pat dry. Grate the **zest*** of the **lemon** and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the **orange** using a microplane zester **OR** the "spikey" holes on a grater. Measure 1 teaspoon of the **orange zest**. Add the measured **orange zest** and all of the **lemon zest** to the bowl with the **garlic**.

1 to 2 tablespoons Italian parsley, leaves and fine stems, chopped

Parsley: Wash 6 to 10 stems fresh **parsley** under cool running water; dry by gently tossing in a cloth kitchen towel **OR** using a salad spinner. Remove/cut off the **leaves** and **fine stems**; coarsely chop to yield **1 to 2 tablespoons**. Set aside for later.

4 ounces turkey bacon, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch dice

Bacon: Cut the **bacon** into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch (very small) dice. Set aside.

2 tablespoons pine nuts

Toast the pine nuts: Place the pine nuts in a large (12- to 14-inch) skillet (preferably non-stick) over medium to medium-high heat; allow the **pine nuts** to toast, stirring occasionally, until the **nuts** are light golden brown and have a noticeably toasty smell. When toasted, remove the **pine nuts** from the skillet; set aside.

$\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon vegetable oil **OR** butter
Diced turkey bacon (*prepared earlier*)

Cook the bacon: Still over medium to medium-high heat, add the **oil OR butter** to the skillet; allow it to heat for 30 seconds. Add the **diced bacon**. (If using **pork pancetta** or **bacon**, the **oil** or **butter** is not needed. It could be helpful if using **lean ham**.) Sauté the **turkey bacon**, stirring occasionally, until lightly golden. Leave the bacon in the pan --

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
Leeks, sliced (*prepared earlier*)
Asparagus pieces (*prepared earlier*)

Cook the asparagus: Add **1 tablespoon butter** to skillet; heat briefly to melt. Add the **sliced leeks**; sauté for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring occasionally (they will not be tender at this point). Add the **asparagus**; continue to sauté until the **asparagus** is **crisp tender**, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Garlic, diced (*prepared earlier*)
Lemon and orange zest, grated (*prepared earlier*)
Pine nuts, toasted (*prepared earlier*)
Parsley, chopped (*prepared earlier*)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground white **OR** black pepper

Flavor, garnish and serve: Add the **garlic**, **lemon** and **orange zest**, toasted **pine nuts**, **parsley**, **salt** and **pepper**; sauté for about 1 minute, until fragrant. Taste; add additional **salt** and **pepper**, as needed or desired. Serve immediately.

* **Zest** is the colored layer of the peel of any citrus fruit - lemons, limes, orange and grapefruit. When grating the zest, remove only the colored layer. **Avoid** grating into the white layer of the peel (the pith), as it has a bitter flavor. Grating into the pith/white layer will impart that bitter character to the recipe.
