



# Asparagus Measuring



It's May on Tractor Ted's farm, and time to harvest the asparagus. With its long, sturdy stems and delicate buds, asparagus is a distant relative of the lily. Try using asparagus spears to measure items in the setting to give your children an active means of exploring this unusual vegetable.

## THIS ACTIVITY...

- encourages children to explore asparagus using all five senses
- introduces the mathematical concept of length
- enables children to explore length through comparison
- introduces 'length' vocabulary (long, short, longer, shorter, longest, shortest)
- gives children the chance to sort items into groups, according to their length
- offers a new and active way of exploring the indoor and outdoor settings

## WHAT TO DO

### Investigating asparagus -

Introduce a few asparagus spears to the children. Aim to include chunky/thick, slender/thin, long and short spears. Look at the different colours, shapes and details – the darker green buds, pale green stems and delicate purple leaves. Show older children how the green colour gets paler until it is almost white at the end of the stem. Look at the shape of the buds, the tiny triangular leaves and the cut end of the asparagus. Break a thinner spear into pieces and listen out for the 'snap' sound it makes. Can the children pick up the faint scent of the asparagus juice? Steam a few spears and compare the taste, texture and smell of the raw and cooked asparagus.

### Measuring with asparagus

Draw the children's attention to the length of the asparagus spears and gather some long, thin items such as pencils, combs and ribbons. Show the children how to place an asparagus spear alongside an item and check whether it's longer than the asparagus spear. Once the children have had some practice with asparagus measuring, test for items that are shorter than the asparagus spear. With older children, you can also measure and identify items that are 'about the same length' as the asparagus spear. Give each child their own asparagus spear and send them on a hunt for items to measure.



## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- When showing children how to measure with their asparagus spears, highlight the importance of aligning the end of the asparagus with the end of the item.
- Find different ways of organising and recording results. Use mats or hoops for sorting items into 'longer than/ shorter than/about the same length as' or 'equal too' for older children. Take photos of non-portable items such as a door handle or table leg.
- Look out for ways to develop the children's exploration and understanding of length. For example, introducing a teaspoon and a desert spoon shows the children that the same category of item can come in different lengths.
- Rescue the asparagus once the activity is over and use it in a cooking activity (see 'Vegetable Sauce Sorting'). Once the spears have been rinsed and boiled, they are fine to eat - and it's important for children to understand that we should never waste food.
- Set up a free choice asparagus measuring activity with a variety of items. Maintain interest by changing the items and encourage the children to add their own finds for others to measure. If you have used all your asparagus for pasta sauce, ask the children to draw and colour asparagus spears on strips of card. Laminate the cards, cut out the spears and use in place of real asparagus.



## Everyday Items For 'Asparagus Measuring'

pencils  
rulers  
paintbrushes  
tea spoons and desert spoons  
blunt knives and forks  
socks  
ribbons  
scarves  
ties  
flower stems  
twigs  
gardening tools  
other vegetables and fruit  
bag handles



## Standard and non-standard units of measurement

When used for measuring, an asparagus spear counts as a 'non-standard unit of measurement'. Non-standard units of measurement can be any items that are not normally used for measuring – such as a piece of string or an asparagus spear. In contrast, a 'standard unit of measurement' (such as a centimetre or inch) is a recognised and consistent measure. Non-standard units of measurement are easier for young children to explore because they don't necessitate counting the numbers on a ruler or tape measure.

