

2013 Empire Asparagus Festival Poetry Contest

1st Prize

Mary O'Neill

Glory Hog

"Glory hog," said strawberry.
Not meaning to, but sounding caddy.
"It's like we don't exist!"
The fiddlehead was miffed.

"I know, right? What about me?"
Cried leek, hysterically.
"You think you have it hard?
Try being me," whined rhubarb.

"They don't care about any of us!"
They sobbed, a rising chorus.
"They only care about asparagus!"

"Now, now, now, let's not fuss
There are benefits to being us."
Said Morel, from his hiding place.
"Who wants to end up on a dinner plate?"

"Asparagus's numbers will demise
But, most of us will stay alive."
He impressed upon the early edibles.
And, Morel's logic proved indelible—

"They don't care about any of us!"
They sang, a rising chorus.
"And, we're so glad we're not asparagus!"

2nd Prize

R. D. Andrews

Ode To Asparagus

Now sits a toad
by asparagus spear
and licks his lips,
he has no fear.

The spear which stands
beside him tall
is new this day,
as are they all.

The fine young crop,
which around him rises,
affords him shade
in many sizes.

An approaching sound
he soon will hear
as the picker cuts
each tender spear.

His forest goes
to plate and table,
to pleasure those
who know this fable.

His forest gone,
our sunburned toad
seeks shade and cool
far from the road.

He waits for dawn
when up will bust,
a forest of
ASPARAGUS!

3rd Prize

Sylvia Duncan

Perennial Roots

The old Maple City farmhouse sagged and stank,
Redolent of coal oil and neglect.
Barely inhabitable, uninsurable,
A pink washcloth froze solid on the edge of the tub that winter.

Young and determined, we slaved: crowbar and shovel first,
Followed by hammer, broom, and paintbrush.
Our little boy helped lug chunks of oak for the woodstove.
Capabilities and energy stretched far beyond reason.

Soft spring glided in and was repelled by our frayed tempers.
Drops of warm rain splashed and filled a stockpot on the bedroom floor,
While our meager bank account emptied day by day.
The syrup we wrested from the trees turned out smoky and unpalatable.

Sadly, aimlessly, hearts worn on our dusty shirtsleeves,
Tom and I wandered into the farmyard
yearning for a glimpse of something – anything – just one reason to stay.
Everywhere, things aslant, as weary as we.

Suddenly, a tender miracle appeared before our eyes.
Behind the crooked henhouse in an overlooked, century-old garden,
Three straight rows of perfect spears greeted us.
Valiant soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, firm in the midst of chaos.

We breathed deeply—fresh country air—and shared our first spring smiles.
Hope rises with the asparagus under Leelanau bluebird skies—
Perennial roots endure and thrive in fragile, sandy soil.

Thomas J. Schwartz

Ode to Asparagus

Spring has sprung in the Northern Lands.
Asparagus sprouts throughout the sands.
Pick it and eat it, all day and all night
Let's dance and party. Life is such a delight

Arts' Tavern is first with pig roast and beer.
Right Brain Brewery's the one that's on tap here
It's frothy and cold for quenching your thirst
Then race the 5K in Empire, you may come in first

Arts Tavern serves pig roast and Asparagus Beer
People come from lands, far and near
They sing and dance with a listening ear
To "The Benzie Playboys" while drinking their beer

Steamed Asparagus, smothered in butter
Or cut up for soup, homemade by one's mother
Hearty and hot it's good for the soul
I really shouldn't but I'll have one more bowl

I'm filled to the brim with Asparagus and beer
I'd lie down and sleep if my bed was near
I'll walk home, enriched with memories so fond
And remember this festival and with those I did bond

Two Haikus

Asparagus Rocks
It's good for body and soul
Cook it, eat it, Yum

Wild Asparagus
Hunt it, pick it, cook it, Yum
Eating is the best

Nancy Davidson

Ode to Asparagus

And here you are again, my friend,
standing tall, strong,...and green.

Each year we eagerly await your arrival, and the bounty you bring...
a clone of yourself, multiple examples,
standing tall, strong, ...and green.

We can always count on you to arrive each spring bearing gifts,
so tender, tasty, healthful, that also
stand tall, strong,...and green.

We consume your wondrous offerings with gusto, giving thanks,
and so looking forward to the next year, when the coming of spring
reminds us that soon we will have the great pleasure
to experience yet another visit from our good friend
Asparagus,
standing tall, strong,...and green.

David Johnson

The Ode to Asparagus

Though I've heard one Kermit state, "It's not easy being green,"
I still aspire to be asparagus because it's also lean and mean.

That straight and upright stalk which so nobly spears the soil,
Boldly emerges in the spring to be lightly grilled, sautéed and boiled.

Or, when pureed into soup that most attest to tastes divine,
It's culinary status reaches the level of sublime.

It can take the chopping block or easily stand the fire,
As countless recipe offerings will attest to in Empire.

They say there's a famous Gus in a musical called "Cats,"
But, if compared to Norconk's (aspara)GUS, he'd have to tip his hat.

This paean to young shoots, which from earthly rhizome stems have sprouted,
Extols the virtues of asparagus; yet, who among us here would doubt it?

Mary Iwanicki

When in the Spring the trees do bud
And daffodils do bloom
An early veggie pokes its head
Begins to make some room

To grow and rise above the grass
It's graceful stem appears
With sun and rain it reaches high
Until the farmer nears

He wields his knife and cuts the stem
Then gathers quite a few
Of these delicious treasures
Which are delicate when new

He takes them home with smiling face
To share them with his kin
And when the dish is well prepared
He calls his family in

To sup on emerald stems and heads
Enjoy this feast for kings
And cultivate fond memories of
This harbinger of Spring

Michael Sinclair

To Asparagus, a Sonnet:

When I was young my Uncle Gus
Challenged me to find
A word to rhyme 'asparagus'
A task that stretched my mind.

I'd long since conquered 'silver'
That didn't take much fuss
But it took much more than skill for
Rhyming 'asparagus'.

But then one balmy mid-spring day
I ate those soft green spears
With toasties and some Hollandaise
It brought me near to tears.

So here's to you, dear Uncle Gus
I'll eat, not rhyme, asparagus.

The Pajama Game?

Hey there, you with your fonds in the air,
Don't let them make a stew of you,
You are much tastier fare.

Hey there, you ought to be upon a grill,
Lightly dressed in vinagerette,
With maybe a touch of dill.

Won't you take this recipe I had from my mother,
Trim a pound of asparagus spears,
Grill them red hot till they're seared,
Then serve with toast and beer
And a slathering of butter.

Hey there, in Hadley or Empire,
Edens of asparagus,
You set our hearts on fire.

Michael Sinclair

Wordsworth

Two hundred and nine years and two months after he walked into Town-end, Grasmere, Willie Wordsworth was wandering in the Michigan dunes when he happened upon the town of Empire:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That dale and hill o'er floats on high
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of green asparagii,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand I saw at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed –and gazed –but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
Watching basketball in a sloth,
I hunger for a quick stir-fry
Of green spears in a buttery broth;
Then my beloved makes my day,
With asparagus and chardonnay.

[Note: this is nearly copied from the famous "Daffodils". Two lines in the first and most of the last stanza I've changed.]

Jeanne Strathman
Ode to Asparagus

By the shores of clear blue waters
By the shores of mighty dunes
Sits a village known as Empire
Sits a town known to aspire

Came along familia lily
Came the plant we do admire

ASPARAGUS! ASPARAGUS!, THE MIGHTY ASPARAGUS!

Pointed, pointy and anointed
Eaten, brewed, put in a stew
Oh! The mighty asparagus!
For whom the springtime festival has been named

A parade honors you! Heidi and Paul dress up like you!
Young maidens and handsome beaus bow down to you!

Can an aspirant ever measure up to your greenness?
Would it not be for aspersion, aspergillus may have taken your place

Let go aspergillum and say it isn't so!
And keep thy mighty asparagus close to thine heart

And wander nevermore to Astarte

Notes:

aspergillus (fungus), aspergillum (brush for holy water), Astarte(goddess of fertility)

Elaine and Rick Webb

Sue and John Wanke

Our Tribute to Asparagus

(With special thanks to Peter, Paul and Mary)

1.

ALL OUR BAGS WERE PACKED AND READY TO GO
TO THE ANNUAL ASPARAGUS SHOW
WE'D WAITED FOR A LONG YEAR TO RETURN

ALL THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF THE PREVIOUS YEAR
MADE US ANXIOUS TO FIN'LY GET HERE
WE'D WAITED FOR A LONG YEAR TO RETURN

SO LET'S PRAISE ASPARAGUS;
HOW IT IS SO RARE TO US
EAT AND DRINK; ENJOY THE GREEN VEGGIE
FOR TOO SOON IT WILL BE DONE
AND ALSO GOES AWAY OUR FUN
ASPARAGUS, WE LOVE YOU SO.....

2.

IF I HAD ASPARAGUS
I'D EAT IT IN THE MORNING,
I'D EAT IT IN THE EVENING
I'D EAT IT ALL DAY

I'D EAT IT BROILED,
I'D EAT IT SAUTEED,
I'D EAT IT SALTED AND PEPPERED,
BUTTERED AND CHEESY
I'D EAT IT ALL WAYS.....OOOH, OOOH, OOOH, OOOH....

Elaine and Rick Webb

Sue and John Wanke

3.

HOW MANY STALKS DOES IT TAKE TO DELIGHT
TO SATISFY OUR APPETITE?
AND HOW MANY WAYS CAN YOU COOK SUCH A TREASURE
TO GIVE EVERYONE SO MUCH PLEASURE?
AND HOW MANY YEARS CAN WE VISIT THIS PLACE
THAT'S FILLED WITH FRIENDSHIP AND GRACE?

THE ANSWER, MY FRIEND, IS GROWING IN THE FIELDS
THE ANSWER IS GROWING IN THE FIELDS

4.

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND
THIS LAND IS MY LAND
FROM LEELANAU COUNTY TO LENAWEE COUNTY
FROM ASPARAGUS FIELDS TO LAKE MICHIGAN WATERS,
THIS LAND WAS MADE FOR YOU AND ME.

AS WE WERE WALKING THE STREETS OF EMPIRE
WE SMELLED ASPARAGUS AND IT DID INSPIRE US
TO RAISE OUR VOICES AND SING ITS PRAISES
THIS VEGGIE WAS MADE FOR YOU AND ME.

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND
THIS LAND IS MY LAND
FROM LEELANAU COUNTY TO LENAWEE COUNTY
FROM ASPARAGUS FIELDS TO LAKE MICHIGAN WATERS,
ASPARAGUS WAS MADE FOR YOU TO PEE.

Jeanmarie Riccobono

Showing Up

Well, here we are again.
Though, I must admit
This is all a little embarrassing for me.
I can't help but think
'Do I deserve so much attention for just
Showing up?'
I prefer the other months of the year
When you don't think of me at all.
Some of you even dressed
Like me.
You are so kind, but
Isn't that a little 'over the top'?
I know that I should be
More grateful.
I'm only doing my job,
That's it,
it's just what I do.
I show up.
I'm here now.
I've spent the year thinking about how to put it to you delicately,
You've gone to so much trouble...
Well, thank you.
For being here-
For showing up.

Anne Cibulskis

I Ate All of the Asparagus

After
Saying
Please,
After
Reaching
Across,
Greed
Usurped
Sense.

Timothy Chapman

This just in from Associated Press Wire Service: Kim Jong-un sends super secret agent to Leelanau County to secure shipment of Purple Passion Asparagus; the agent, a sequestered chef from Brooklyn, New York City, by the name of BIG D, defected, seeking refuge at the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Ranger Station, Empire Michigan.

Asparagus officinalis is a spring [vegetable](#), a flowering [perennial](#) plant species in the genus *Asparagus*. It was once classified in the [lily](#) family, like its Allium cousins, onions and garlic, but the [Liliaceae](#) have been split and the onion-like plants are now in the family [Amaryllidaceae](#) and asparagus in the [Asparagaceae](#). *Asparagus officinalis* is native to most of Europe, northern Africa and western Asia, and is widely cultivated as a vegetable crop: According to Wikipedia.

Gang of four Asparagus bandits thwarted at Little Traverse Lake; burlap sacks filled with bindles of cut asparagus were recovered uneaten; the sheriff was not called.

AP poll results reveal size does matter: Most women prefer slim tender shoots over fat stubs (of asparagus), well oiled and just about raw.

Tailgating, excessive rates of speed in Leelanau County on the rise, motorists detected by radar in speeds in excess of 120 mph; search for farm stands with asparagus singled out as primary impetus...

Ogden Mills Phipps, aka "Dinny," revealed this week that Kentucky Derby Winner Orb's pre-race lunch consisted of fresh asparagus and garlic stir fried in a Chinese wok, and finished with a sardine and anchovie butter.

Irate restaurant patron arrested in Little Traverse Lake area for throwing plate of over cooked Asparagus, or what he referred to as "chewy string" through plate glass window.

And finally this from Craig's List Northern Michigan: SM seeking SF for spring fling: Quote "I have nice Asparagus, and cream...lets go out in the woods and make soup...."

Kelly Farhat

Ode to Asparagus

This ode to my asparagus friend is silly,
But I loved one so,
I called her Lily.
She had on the most beautiful crown,
I admired this as I thought,
"I'm gonna chow you down!"
After I ate her,
I had such shame and guilt,
But I couldn't have allowed her to wilt.
And memories of the scent of my pee,
Could only have come from my beloved, Lily.
Though now the harvest is complete,
I gaze at next year's crops,
And long to eat...
Although Lily was scrumptious,
I do yearn to eat all of these others I've chosen to name fern!

Carrie Cantalupo-Sharp

sitting on the hip of a John Deere tractor
an asparagus corsage on her stalky wrist
the Asparagus Queen has the "parade-wave" down
a tiara of tender green shoots
lime green dress and sandals
emerald beads, baubles
she is dazzling

each time the tractor lurches
she grabs the driver's shoulder
rocks forward
his strong back proud
as if willing to shift gears and circle the Empire block
again and again
until the sunsets

Jennifer Weil

Asparagust of Wind

Too oft have I sat beneath a kind tree
slavering over moments alone with thee.
Sighing, I catch on the merest breeze
a wondrous aroma; my nose it doth tease.

I arise with a start, alert to your magic
and fearing to lose you, foreboding the tragic,
I wrench me from my lugubrious perch
to hunt cunning scent that bids me lurch

through bramble dry and brackish swamp,
over stony pasture and two-tracks to stomp.
Vanquishing foul, irksome pests I allege
my steadfast devotion with this humble pledge:

Where I find you, I drop and on bent knee attend
in thrall, dark to dawn, as from loam you extend,
till the moment precise I must pluck your sweet form
to swath in a butter-bath golden and warm,

then tenderly bring you to plate and to mouth
exalting your flavor east, west, north, and south
as the singular green with the shape of a goddess
and taste that experience surely has taught us

is without any peer elsewhere in the garden--
all other vegetables, begging your pardon;
for Asparagus' glory soars above all, oh!
remains past a succulent chew and a swallow.

Where'er you are savored, you leaveth behind
an alimentary postscript unique, well designed
to humble your status: neath God you must carry
one lowlier trait, your stink that doth tarry.

Lo, of disparagement no words do I speak;
with pride do I cloak me in thy honorable reek.
Discrete among a myriad postprandial smells
your asparagusting wind, nonpareil, excels.

Jennifer Weil

Asparagus: Love in Any Language

We cherish for reasons too reckless to fathom,
which wrench us from tongue-tied to babbling spasm
attempting to capture with poor words untrustable
the rhapsodic qualities of a food supragustable,
found in all kitchens most humble to noble,
from hamlets obscure to metropolises global.
Thus we must chortle of *asparagus officianalis*,
delicate spires whose taste over all is
no matter the service--paper plates or ceramic,
pewter or china or glass--a dynamic
without a contender to reckon a peer,
so nuanced and rare is this elegant spear.
It wins palate's praise with no more than dashed salt
yet under a sauce of cream Sherried, we exalt
what boldly stands up to so weighty a drape,
whether next to a planked fish or wrapped in a crepe.
There is nothing to which it must bow, this *asperge*--
request of a waiter, chef, or concierge
to name any other vegetable cargo
that meets the delights of the sweet spring *espargo*.
Can there be a bud like *Asparagus esculentus*
that while we await May can so much torment us
we shall dream of the salad or bisque *asparag*,
driven half to delirium, with taste buds agog;
not to mention our hearts and whims gustatory
left bereft by *et alia* of the green category.
Yes, bring us the stalk whose texture and smell
can cause duels at the table and send us pell mell
to the garden in search of the last one remaining,
for love mad and hopeless of justly explaining.

Chelsea Newcomb

An ode to asparagus: my love affair with a spear

Asparagus, my love, where to begin?
I saw you at the market, and put you in my basket.
Your green, tender stalks I could not ignore;
and your taste I truly adore.

Springtime comes and your presence is well known;
just ask any bathroom, in any home.
You will be grilled, roasted, and steamed.
Perhaps even creamed.
Salad, soup, or quiche, your possibilities I must unleash.

Asparagus, my love, I'm forever committed;
taking you home and having my way with you, if permitted.
I shall savor every bite, without any waste.
Roasting you al dente, without any haste.
A drizzle of balsamic, for the finishing touch...
Becoming infatuated did not take much.

Some may find you offensive, appalling, or even slightly queer.
Pay no attention to them, for they cannot grasp the true glory...
Of such a spear.

Karen Grant

I, Asparagus (or, I Never Read 50 Shades of Gray, Really)

Take me take me now!
because I don't stay fresh for long!
snap me at the root!
Steam me bake me boil me sautee me eat me raw or fry me very deep!!!
and then
and then
and then
and then . . .
Roll me in melted butter
Sprinkle me with sea salt
and parmesan
until I am positively
swimming in it.

Ann Bardens-McClellan

We Are Asparagus

We swim in ponds too shallow
for swimming.

We wear skirts too small
for cover.

We bathe
in verdant dye until
our stalks
burst through
winter's darkness.

Ruffled golden girls glide by
on paddle-wheeled steamboats,
waving red handkerchiefs
and yoo-hooing us,
while we cling
to the sandy bank,
growing greener
day by day

Mary Catherine Wickens

The Asparagus Fight Song – Blue Version
(Can be sung to the University of Michigan fight song tune)

Hail to the verdant stalk
Hail to the stately spear
Hail, Hail Asparagus
The sweetest and the best
Now for a cheer
They are here
Spring brings their tender spear
In stalwart rows they're growing
Farmers keep on sowing
Hail to the luscious lilly
Hail to their ferns so pretty
Hail, Hail Asparagus
The best ever Veg.

The Asparagus Fight Song – Green Version
(Can be sung to the MSU fight song tune)

On the banks of the Platte River
Is a Veg that's known to all
Its specialty is sweetness
And ferns that grow so tall
Asparagus is eaten
In the spring, not fall
Tender little lilly tips
Are enjoyed by all
Asparagus is winning
With vitamins galore
Its lovely spears
Will make you cheer
And eat it all the more
A-SPAR-A-GUS!
Asparagus is growing
So lovely and so tall
Asparagus, Asparagus, Asparagus
Aasparagus for All!

Children's Poems

1st prize

Grace Raheim

asparagus is a tall stalk
but it can never walk
and though it is tall
it takes the lead
and shines.

2nd Prize

Karnie Purchase

The prickly stalks
Transform when my dad cooks it
Smells good in the pan

3rd prize: tie

Emma Lane

Green asparagus
Some are skinny some are fat
Freshly picked is best

Sophia Stout

Roses are Red,
Violets are Blue,
I love asparagus,
And so will you

David Davies

Formby, (Merseyside), England

THOMAS FRESH: a Formby folk hero 1803 -1861

1st Verse:

E *E7* *A* *E*
Have you heard the tale of Thomas Fresh

E *E7* *B7*
Who lived down Freshfield Road?

E *A*
And Freshfield was named after him.

E *B7* *E*
Asparagus was his gold

CHORUS,

E *A*
Thomas Fresh, o, Thomas Fresh,

E *B7*
Of you the people sing.

E *A*
Your ghost lives on down Freshfield way,

E *B7* *E*
Our first asparagus king.

Now Tom was born of farming stock
Among the Cumbrian hills
But Liverpool Town attracted him
Where he worked to pay his bills

Chorus

The first Inspector of Nuisances
In smelly old Liverpool town,
He brought their manure by railway
And spread it on barren ground

Chorus

He owned the land behind Freshfield
And built a station there
And from his sidings carted dung
A mixture rich and rare

Chorus

And when the first green shoots appeared
In the warmth of the April sun,
He tenderly nursed his asparagus crop
'Til harvest time had come.

Chorus.

He made his fortune from Liverpool dung
And built him a fine big house,
He'd drive to church in a pony and trap
And gave riches to his spouse.

Chorus

But Thomas' days as a self-made man
Came to an end one day.
He'd fiddled the Council's books, they say,
And he fled to the U.S. of A.

Final Chorus