

# 2013 Empire Asparagus Festival Poetry Contest

## 1<sup>st</sup> 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!"

## 2<sup>nd</sup> 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!

## 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

1<sup>st</sup> prize

**Grace Raheim**

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

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize

**Karnie Purchase**

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

3<sup>rd</sup> 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***

### **1<sup>st</sup> 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*