



## ASPARAGUS OF THE SPRING

by Antonio Penzo



All good things have a blessed origin, they say, and the asparagus does not escape from this legend. They told that Saint Anthony of Padua coming back from his Africa missions imported seeds of this vegetable, sowing it along the hedges and taking with him this tasty food in Italy; nevertheless this plant was original from Asia then it was cultivated in Northern Africa. Its presence is a clear sign that spring is going to arrive leaving behind the cold winter: the green end of the wild asparagus pops out from the brown earth along the hedges. But this is not the only sign of the incoming season of the flowers, there are a lot of more and all tasty things.

Only few of us saw these fine turionis (this is the name of the subaerial part of the asparagus) near the fields, under the bare hedges, but it is not so rare to see a person that threads under the earth one thin and sharp blade without damaging the mother plant and pick up some thin and green sticks putting them back in a basket.

We are well aware that when the month of April begins we can find on the greengrocer stalls or in the market places cone-shaped bunches of asparagus that attract our attention and make our mouth watering. The sun is going to warm the earth so its temperature does not drop near zero, but remains up 10 degrees. The vegetable life are literally bursting out, after that its roots continue to live under the frozen crust putting forth a lot of buds. In the fields where the implantation in the asparagus cultivation is practised there are a lot of succulent fruit buds. If the land cultivation is "little case" shaped there will grow the white asparagus, if instead the land is flat is good for the green asparagus. The turionis growth must be quick, in this way the taste will be delicate and of a tender consistency, while the growth is slow the flavour will be bitterish; for this reason is necessary a steady warm.

Once picked up the turionis and cleaned from the earth we are ready to assemble bunches of 500 or 1000 gr that are ready to sold on the market.

There are two types of bunches: one with thin turionis, called "asparagine" good for "risotto", soup dishes, and for all the dishes where the asparagus has to be minced in little pieces, instead if the turionis is coarse this is boiled and served in its entirety. Steam cooking is the best one. It is important to know that the asparagus, once strained, continues to cook and so it is necessary to avoid a long lasting cooking that would pauperize its quality and the nutritive values of the vegetables. The time needed for the cooking is from 10 to 15 min. The hot asparagus is perfect with melted butter and Parmesan cheese or spiced by hot sauces; if the asparagus is served cold is perfect with mayonnaise, oil and lemon or spiced by cold sauces; the egg intensifies its flavour. Asparagus is one of the ingredients of the starters, main courses and desserts.

You can taste it even during the festivals cooked in different ways.