



ANSON MILLS

Asparagus Gomae (Asparagus with Japanese-Style Sesame Sauce)

Yield

6 to 8 side dish portions

Time

About 20 minutes, start to finish

Cooking Remarks

Extra-slender asparagus offers the best the sauce to stalk ratio in each bite. If you can find only medium-thick spears (those with a diameter similar to a pencil), cut them into thin pieces on a sharp bias. Don't bother with super-thick asparagus here.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a small skillet, a small or medium *suribachi* (Japanese mortar) with a *surikogi* (Japanese pestle) or a clean coffee grinder used exclusively for grinding spices, a medium bowl, a large saucepan, a colander, and a clean kitchen towel.

Ingredients

¼ cup Anson Mills Sea Island Benne Seeds

2 teaspoons sugar

1½ tablespoons Japanese soy sauce, preferably raw

1 teaspoon mirin

¼ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

Fine sea salt

½ lemon, seeded

1 pound very slender asparagus (⅜ to ¼ inch in diameter), trimmed and cut on the bias into 1-inch lengths

Directions

1. In a small skillet over medium-low heat, toast the benne seeds, stirring very frequently, until they are a shade darker in color and only lightly fragrant. Don't over-toast them, as they will become bitter if you do. Pour the seeds into a *suribachi*, if you own one, or into a clean coffee grinder used exclusively for grinding spices. Let the seeds cool completely.

2. If you're using a *suribachi*, grind the seeds with a *surikogi*, or pulse them in the spice grinder, until they are broken down to a coarse powder (if you're using a spice grinder, be careful not overprocess them, lest they become an oily paste). Empty the seeds into a medium bowl. Add the sugar, soy sauce, mirin, white pepper, and a pinch of salt; squeeze in a few drops of lemon juice; and stir until well combined. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside.

- 3.** Fill a large saucepan with water and bring the water to a boil over high heat. Meanwhile, fill a medium bowl with ice water. Set a colander in the sink.
- 4.** When the water reaches a boil, add about a teaspoon of salt, and then drop in the asparagus. Cook until the asparagus is bright green and crisp-tender, 30 to 60 seconds (slightly longer if the spears were thicker than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch). Immediately drain the asparagus in the colander and plunge the pieces into the ice water to halt the cooking. As soon as the asparagus has cooled (do not let it languish in the ice water or it will become waterlogged), once again drain the pieces in the colander and pick out any ice cubes. Lay out a clean kitchen towel, empty the asparagus onto it, and pat dry.
- 5.** Put the asparagus in the bowl with the benne seed mixture and toss until evenly coated. Taste for seasoning and add more salt and/or lemon juice, if needed. Transfer to a nice bowl and serve.