

Asparagus with Toasted Sesame Aioli

- From Vegetarian Appetizers by Paulette Mitchell



Paris kisses Saigon in this heavenly aioli. Here bold, toasty sesame oil adds depth to the classic French garlic-lemon [mayonnaise](#). Arrange the crisp-tender asparagus spears, tips up, in a tall, clear glass, with the sesame sauce nearby, served in a radicchio leaf cup for color.

I have made this appetizer several times and it's always a hit and people WANT the recipe. So, I'm sharing it with you because "IT'S THAT GOOD!"

INGREDIENTS: 16 medium-thick asparagus spears (about 12 ounces), trimmed to even lengths (see Tips)

TOASTED SESAME AIOLI:

1/4 cup mayonnaise (use Vegenaïse if you'd like the vegan version)
1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
2 teaspoons soy sauce
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh ginger
1 clove garlic, minced, or 1/2 teaspoon prepared minced garlic

TO COMPLETE THE RECIPE: 1 radicchio leaf (optional)
Additional toasted sesame seeds for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. Steam the asparagus in a covered steamer over boiling water until crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Although I don't like using a microwave, the recipe includes how to steam them that way so here you go. Put the asparagus in a microwave-proof dish and add about 2 tablespoons water. Cover tightly and microwave on high for about 3 minutes.
2. Drain well. Rinse with cold water and drain again.

Meanwhile, make the aioli:

1. Stir together all the aioli ingredients in a small bowl until smooth.
2. To serve, arrange the asparagus spears in a tall, clear glass container.
3. Spoon the sauce into a radicchio leaf or a small dish
4. Garnish with sesame seeds, and place nearby for dipping.

Tips: Asparagus is at its best in the early spring; however, it is available year round in most markets. Choose green spears with firm stalks; the tips should be tightly closed and have a lavender hue. To store, wrap in a plastic bag and store in the vegetable crisper; use within 2 to 3 days. If wilted, stand the stalks in a jar filled with 2 inches of very cold water. Cover with a plastic bag, seal, and refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours before cooking.

Buy dark, amber-colored Asian sesame oil, made from toasted sesame seeds, rather than light-colored sesame oil, which is extracted from raw sesame seeds and lacks the distinctive strong aroma and nutty flavor. Purchase Asian sesame oil in the Asian section of supermarkets or in Asian markets. After opening, store it in the refrigerator, where it will keep for up to 6 months.

Toasting gives sesame seeds a slightly crispy texture and a nutty flavor. Put the seeds in a dry skillet over medium-high heat and toss constantly until they are lightly browned, about 3 to 5 minutes. Or, toast them on a jelly-roll pan in a preheated 350°F oven for about 10 minutes. Shake the pan or stir the seeds occasionally while toasting. Immediately transfer the seeds to a bowl. It takes the same amount of time to toast 1 tablespoon or 1/2 cup, so toast extra seeds, store them in an airtight container, and refrigerate or freeze for up to 6 months.

ADVANCE PREPARATION: The asparagus can be cooked up to 1 day in advance. The sauce will keep for up to 1 week in a covered container in the refrigerator. Bring both to room temperature for serving.