

Formby  
Asparagus



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Formby, near Liverpool, was once widely renowned for the quality of its award-winning asparagus grown on the fine, sandy soil of the local dunes.

It is estimated that some 200 acres were devoted to asparagus growing around Formby Point in the early 1940's. The most notable growers included the Aindow family (who farmed at the "Willow Slacks" around Lifeboat Road and later at Victoria Road), Jonathan Formby, the Brook family from Larkhill Farm and Jimmy Lowe, who established his Pinetrees Farm at Victoria Road.

#### *A specialised habitat for asparagus*

Asparagus thrives in the freely drained sands of the Formby coastline. The crop has to be grown on long rotation because after 10 to 15 years, the land becomes exhausted and can only be used for rough grazing.

#### *Hard work*

Growing asparagus in the dunes is a particularly labour-intensive process that involves carting and leveling to form a bed, and delving for yellow sand to bring an old bed back into production. The asparagus takes 3 years to develop from seed to a productive crown and can be expected to crop for 10 years when conditions are favourable.

#### *Short season*

Typically the season lasts for about 6 weeks, starting at the end of April and culminating in early June. Traditionally, no asparagus is cut after the 21st of June, a date held in almost sacred veneration. After then, the rows are hand weeded and the fern allowed to grow to 6 foot tall for the seeds. These are carefully harvested and sown for the next generation of young plants.

#### *The future*

Today, there are only a handful of growers left on Formby Point growing this premium product. They are continually faced with competition from abroad with cheaper, higher yield varieties. There is no doubt that the Formby product is quite unique in both heritage and flavour and should be supported in years to come.

