



ISTRIA

Recipes and stories from the hidden heart
of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia

Paola Bacchia



We call asparagus *sparisi*. In Istria, spindly asparagus grows wild and is sold from buckets on the roadside. I always buy my asparagus spears loose – big handfuls of them – and store them in the fridge with their stems in a glass of water, much like a bunch of flowers. They last for ages that way.

The quantity of asparagus in the recipe below depends on the size of the spears. I use the thinnest ones I can find, so each prosciutto-wrapped bundle has three or four thin spears. If you can only find medium to thick spears, modify the quantities accordingly. Similarly, with the prosciutto, if the slices are large, feel free to cut them in half lengthways.

Asparagus prosciutto wraps

(Asparagi con il prosciutto)

Serves 4

36 thin asparagus spears
(or 24 medium ones)
sea salt and freshly cracked
black pepper
iced water
6–12 slices prosciutto,
thinly sliced
2 tablespoons extra virgin
olive oil, plus extra to serve
1 handful of parsley leaves,
finely chopped, plus extra
to serve
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
zest of 1 lemon
55 g (2 oz) parmesan,
thinly shaved

Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F) fan-forced. Line a shallow baking tray that will fit all the asparagus in a single layer.

Trim the woody ends from the asparagus and make sure the spears are approximately the same length. Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil and drop in the asparagus spears. Cook them for a few minutes, depending on how thick they are; I cook thin spears for 2 minutes. You need to partially cook the asparagus, so it still has a bit of bite. Plunge the spears into iced water, then drain, pat dry and set aside.

If you have large or wide slices of prosciutto, cut them in half lengthways.

Place the olive oil, parsley, garlic and lemon zest in a shallow tray. Season with salt and pepper. Drag the asparagus spears through the oil so they are well coated.

Depending on the size of the spears, wrap one, two or three spears in a slice of prosciutto, on an angle if needed, so that most of the spears, except for the two ends, are covered in prosciutto. Lay them on the prepared tray and repeat until you have a single layer of asparagus bundles. Scatter the parmesan over the top.

Bake on the top shelf of the oven for about 12 minutes, until the cheese has melted and the prosciutto is crispy. Garnish with extra parsley and drizzle on a bit of olive oil if you like. Allow to cool for a few minutes before serving.