

Germany's celebration of



by Genevieve Northup

You know spring has arrived in Germany when local restaurants start featuring asparagus, known as “spargel,” on their menus. The asparagus harvest is celebrated throughout Germany and enthusiastically called “Spargelzeit,” meaning “asparagus time.”

White *spargel* is referred to as Germany's “royal vegetable.” Although its history of origin in Germany is sparsely documented, white *spargel* was popularized by French and German royalty in the 17th and 18th centuries. Grown underground, white *spargel* retains a milky white color and more delicate flavor and texture than its green counterpart. The white variety is celebrated in a number of *spargelfests* every April to June, particularly in German regions near the Deutsche Weinstraße.

Schwetzingen, a small town between Mannheim and Heidelberg, is considered the center of the “Asparagus Triangle,” and also dubbed the “asparagus capital of the world” due to its perfect soil and climate for growing *spargel*. The town's restaurants create more than forty dishes utilizing the vegetable, which appear on their seasonal menus from April to June. Sample traditional favorites like steamed asparagus with hollandaise sauce, the popular appetizer of *spargel* wrapped in prosciutto or *spargel* cream soup. If you're feeling adventurous, try asparagus ice cream. Whatever you decide, make sure you finish your dish; it is considered rude to leave any *spargel* uneaten.

Schwetzingen celebrates the vegetable with Spargelsamstag on Saturday, May 3, 2014. Along *Spargelmeile* (Asparagus Mile), tents serve up dishes starring *spargel*. Local businesses and organizations provide entertainment, such as face painting, fashion shows, musical performances and cooking demonstrations.

Bruchsal devotes the entire season to Spargel Live. Discover how the produce is harvested and sold, watch *spargel*-peeling competitions, book *spargel*-cooking classes, or take a one- or two-day self-guided culinary bike tour with the help of www.tour-de-spargel.de. Still want more *spargel*? Visit the Büchenauer Spargelfest May 24-26, 2014 in southern Bruchsal.

The quaint town of Erpolzheim, known for beautiful and traditional architecture, hosts an annual event to commemorate the *spargel* harvest and the area's wines. Named the Kulinarische Wanderung um Obst Spargel und Wein, this culinary wandering takes place May 24-25, 2014. Follow a 6.5-kilometer path through the town's vineyards while stopping at tents to sample various culinary delights showcasing *spargel* and a variety of local wines.

Try flammkuchen with *spargel*, *spargel* wrapped in cheese and ham, or skewered shrimp with *spargel* salad. You can even dig for your own *spargel* and purchase wine by the bottle to take home. This event is family- and dog-friendly and provides a great excuse to enjoy beautiful weather and get some exercise. For information, check out www.weingutkohl.de; the 2014 flyer should be available online this month.

Another way to enjoy the *spargel* season is to travel by car, train or bike along the 136-kilometer Badische Spargelstraße, or Baden Asparagus Route. Towns along this route include Karlsruhe, Reilingen, Hockenheim and, of course, Schwetzingen. For more information on the route and events, visit the tourism board website for each city.

Whether you're a fan of *spargel* or not, you'll find great food to savor (some dishes are available sans *spargel*) and wine that accentuates the flavorful cuisine. These unique fests give you the chance to spend quality time with friends and family while exploring this lovely country. *Spargelzeit* is also a sign of the upcoming, much-loved German summer:

See page 44 for a *spargel* crème suppe recipe.



Spargel Crème Suppe

Preparation Time: 20 minutes • Cook Time: 40 minutes • Total Time: 1 hour
Makes 6 servings

Ingredients:

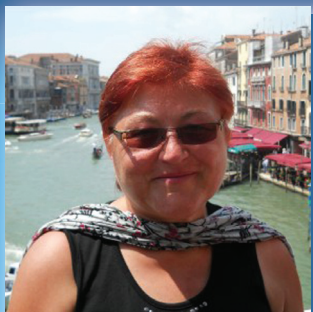
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 1/2 to 2 pounds white asparagus, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces, heads separated
- 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1/2 cup half and half cream
- Salt, to taste
- Freshly ground pepper, to taste
- Dry white wine, to taste
- Parsley for garnish

Preparation:

Peel and chop the white asparagus. In a 4-quart sauce pan, sauté the onion in butter until tender. Add the asparagus pieces, reserving the heads, and steam for 5 minutes. Add the broth and boil gently for about 30 minutes, or until the asparagus is very soft. Purée the soup in batches in the blender or with a hand blender and return to pan. Bring to a simmer and add the reserved asparagus heads. Cook at least 5 minutes, or until they are fork-tender. Turn down the heat and add the cream. Do not boil further. Taste and add salt, freshly ground pepper and wine as preferred. Garnish with parsley.



Courtesy of Jennifer McGavin, About.com Guide



Schnall Travel

Specialist in Travel – Pilgrimages

Study Tours International - Many Destinations

SPRING BREAK IN HOLY LAND

07-13 April 2014. Follow the footsteps of Jesus: Bethlehem – Cana – Jordan River – Sea of Galilee – Jericho – Jerusalem.

56TH INTERNATIONAL MILITARY PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

15-19 May 2014. Visit Nevers, Burgundy and the birthplace of Joan of Arc.

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND IN FRANCE

22-26 May 2014. Mont St. Michel – Rouen – Liseux – Chartres – Paris (Miraculous Medal).

INDEPENDENCE DAY WEEKEND HIGHLIGHTS IN PORTUGAL & SPAIN

03-10 July 2014. Lisbon – Fatima – Batalha – Tomar – Porto – Santiago de Compostela.

Coming soon: 7 Churches (Book of Revelation) / Thanksgiving in Holy Land / Missionary journeys of Paul the Apostle / Assisi - Rome.

CONTACT ANNIE SCHNALL FOR MORE INFORMATION

TEL.: +49 9372 94950 • EMAIL: FASCHNALL@AOL.COM