



Seasonal Vegetable Sides:

Cheesy Asparagus & Sun-Dried Tomato Skillet Veggies

By Robin Miller

CHEESY BAKED ASPARAGUS

Tender spears of asparagus, glistening from olive oil, scented with garlic, and baked under a blanket of cheese. This easy, show-stopping side dish is nutritious, low carb, keto, and excellent for any day of the week, whether it's a speedy weeknight dinner, or weekend gathering with friends.



When the side dish steals the show!

This is one of those swoon-worthy recipes that makes everyone smile. The garlicky asparagus is vibrant and tender-crisp, and the gooey cheese is golden brown and buttery. Every ingredient is sensed and appreciated, from the first savory bite to the last. And since you need just 5 ingredients and about 15 minutes, this dish can be yours any time.

Choose medium-size asparagus spears.

When shopping, look for fresh green spears that are about 1/4- to 1/2-inch thick at the base. Thin spears can burn quickly; we want tender-crisp spears with a hint of caramelization, not charring. If the spears are thicker than 1/2-inch at the base, increase the cooking time accordingly. This recipe calls for 1 pound of asparagus, which is typically about 1 bunch. When in doubt, use the scale found in your store's produce department. Pro tip: While some recipes advise to snap the woody ends from your asparagus, I find that too much of the spear is lost when it breaks. I prefer to use a sharp knife to remove the tough, fibrous, "woody" ends.

Use good quality olive oil.

Since we use just 5 ingredients in this recipe, each one counts. Use a nicely flavored olive to ensure your asparagus also has flavor. This doesn't mean spending a fortune on an imported brand; there are many delicious domestic olive oils with reasonable price tags.

**Use fresh garlic.**

If you follow my recipes, you know I'm a fan of pre-minced garlic, both "fresh" and dried/dehydrated. However, for this recipe, I strongly suggest using fresh garlic for its robust, definitive flavor. The strong, pungent quality of fresh garlic mellows quickly in the oven, and the result is toasty bits of garlic clinging to every cheesy bite of asparagus.

I used mozzarella and parmesan, but you have options.

In this recipe, I prefer the creaminess of mozzarella and the nuttiness of parmesan because those nuances partner well with garlic and asparagus. While you may substitute your favorite cheese, I suggest sticking with varieties that won't overpower the asparagus. For example, choose milder cheeses like Monterey jack, Swiss, and Colby, and steer clear of sharper cheeses like cheddar.

Use a large baking sheet.

For evenly cooked asparagus, the spears should be spread out in a single layer on the baking pan. A small amount of overlapping is fine, but do not pile the spears on top of each other or they won't cook properly.

**When using parchment paper, be mindful of the broiler.**

Do not put your parchment-lined pan close to the broiler when melting the cheese because the paper will burn. Place the pan on the middle oven rack and your cheese will melt just fine.

Try other seasonings.

This cheesy asparagus dish is pure perfection and needs no tweaking. Nevertheless, when and if you'd like to mix things up, consider adding additional seasonings to the oil and garlic mixture. Great additions would be lemon juice and lemon zest, lemon pepper, crushed red pepper flakes, onion powder, and everything bagel seasoning.

Consider doubling or tripling this recipe.

If you're looking for the ultimate side dish for entertaining, look no further. Simply double or triple the ingredients as needed. If necessary, use two sheet pans so you can spread the asparagus spears out in a single layer.

How to store leftovers.

It's highly unlikely that you'll have leftovers, but in the event you do, store the asparagus in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Reheat leftovers in a 300-degree oven, or in the microwave, until hot all the way through. I do not recommend freezing leftovers so use up what you have! Leftover cheesy asparagus makes an excellent addition to sandwiches, wraps, and salads.





Cheesy Baked Asparagus

Serves 4 to 6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound asparagus spears, woody ends trimmed
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh garlic
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/4 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese, preferably freshly grated

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or foil. Place the asparagus spears on the prepared pan (you don't need to spread them out yet).

In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper.

Drizzle the mixture over the asparagus spears and toss to coat evenly. Spread the asparagus out in a single layer (a small amount of overlapping is fine, but do not stack the spears on top of each other).

Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until just starting to soften. Remove the pan from the oven and preheat the broiler.

Top the asparagus with the mozzarella and parmesan cheeses.

Place the pan under the broiler and broil until the cheese is golden and bubbly (note, when using parchment paper, do not put the pan higher than the middle oven rack).

Serve immediately.

SKILLET VEGETABLES WITH SUN DRIED TOMATOES

This vibrant medley features colorful vegetables and chewy-sweet sun dried tomatoes – quickly frizzled in a skillet and tossed with parmesan cheese! I used Brussels spouts and snow peas, but virtually any veggie works.



I love the colors exploding from the skillet in this side dish. Vibrant greens, deep reds, and a hint of caramelization on all of it. And you can easily turn this into a show-stopping main dish by adding some cooked chicken, steak, pork, or shrimp.

If you follow my blog, you know I almost almost blanch my Brussels sprouts before using them in other applications. Since the sprouts are wrapped up tight, blanching helps start the cooking process, which means there is no risk of burning the outside of the vegetable while you wait for the center to tenderize. You can skip it, but it only takes a minute.

Skillet Vegetables with Sun Dried Tomatoes

Serves 4



INGREDIENTS

- 8 ounces Brussels sprouts
- 8 ounces snow peas, or sugar snap peas, or green beans
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced oil-packed sun dried tomatoes, plus 1 tablespoon oil from the jar
- 2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

Blanch the Brussels sprouts in a large pot of boiling water for 1 minute. You can skip this step, but I find the sprouts are more tender/less bitter when you blanch them first.

Trim the stem ends from the sprouts and halve them lengthwise. Do this whether you've blanched them or not.

Heat the tablespoon of sun dried tomato oil (or olive oil) in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the sprouts, cut-side down, and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, until golden brown on the cut side (don't flip them until golden brown).

Add the snow peas and sun dried tomatoes and cook for 1 minute, stirring frequently, until the snow peas are crisp-tender.

Fold in the parmesan cheese.

Season to taste with salt and pepper before serving.

