

NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT:

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UNECE STANDARD FFV-04
concerning the marketing and commercial
quality control of

ASPARAGUS
moving in international trade between and to
UNECE member countries

I. DEFINITION OF PRODUCE

This standard applies to shoots of the varieties (cultivars) grown from *Asparagus officinalis L.* to be supplied fresh to the consumer, asparagus for industrial processing being excluded.

Asparagus shoots are classified into four groups according to colour:

- white asparagus
- violet asparagus, having tips of a colour between pink and violet or purple and a part of the shoot white
- violet/green asparagus, part of which is of violet and green colouring
- green asparagus having tips and most of the shoot green.

This standard does not apply to green and violet/green asparagus of less than 3 mm diameter and white and violet asparagus of less than 8 mm diameter, packed in uniform bundles or unit packages.

II. PROVISIONS CONCERNING QUALITY

The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements of asparagus at the export control stage, after preparation and packaging.

A. Minimum requirements

In all classes, subject to the special provisions for each class and the tolerances allowed, the shoots must be:

- intact
- sound; produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for consumption is excluded
- free from damage caused by unsuitable washing (the shoots may have been washed but not "soaked")
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter
- fresh in appearance and fresh-smelling
- practically free from pests
- practically free from damage caused by pests
- practically unbruised
- free of abnormal external moisture, i.e. adequately "dried" if they have been washed or cooled with cold water
- free of any foreign smell and/or taste.

The cut at the base of the shoots must be as clean as possible.

In addition, shoots must be neither hollow, split, peeled nor broken. Small cracks which have appeared after harvesting are, however, allowed, so long as they do not exceed the limits laid down in Section IV. A. "Quality Tolerances".

The development and condition of the asparagus must be such as to enable them:

- to withstand transport and handling, and
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

B. Classification

Asparagus is classified in three classes defined below:

(i) "Extra" Class

Shoots in this class must be of superior quality, very well formed and practically straight. Having regard to the normal characteristics of the group to which they belong, their tips must be very compact.

Only a few very slight traces of rust on the shoot, removable by normal peeling by the consumer, are allowed.

For the white asparagus group, the tips and shoots must be white; only a faint pink tint is allowed on the shoots.

Green asparagus must be totally green.

No traces of woodiness are allowed for the shoots in this class.

The cut at the base of the shoots must be as square as possible. However, to improve presentation when the asparagus is packed in bundles, those on the outside may be slightly bevelled, so long as the bevelling does not exceed 1 cm.

(ii) Class I

Shoots in this class must be of good quality and well formed. They may be slightly curved. Having regard to the normal characteristics of the group to which they belong, their tips must be compact.

Slight traces of rust removable by normal peeling by the consumer are allowed.

For the white asparagus group, a faint pink tint may appear on the tips and the shoots.

Green asparagus must at least be green for 80 per cent of the length.

In the white asparagus group, no woody shoots are allowed. For the other groups, a trace of woodiness on the lower part is permissible, provided this woodiness disappears by normal peeling by the consumer.

The cut at the base of the shoots must be as square as possible.

(iii) Class II

This class includes shoots which do not qualify for inclusion in the higher classes but satisfy the minimum requirements specified above.

Compared with Class I, shoots may be less well formed, more curved and having regard to the normal characteristics of the group to which they belong, their tips may be slightly open.

Traces of rust, removable by normal peeling by the consumer are allowed.

The tips of white asparagus may have a colouration including a green tint.

The tips of violet asparagus may have a slight green tint.

Green asparagus must at least be green for 60 per cent of the length.

Shoots may be slightly woody.

The cut at the base of the shoots may be slightly oblique.

III. PROVISIONS CONCERNING SIZING

Size is determined by the length and diameter of the shoot.

A. Sizing by length

The length of the shoots must be:

- above 17 cm for long asparagus
- 12 to 17 cm for short asparagus
- for Class II asparagus arranged, but not bundled in the package:
 - a) white and violet: 12 to 22 cm
 - b) violet/green and green: 12 to 27 cm
- under 12 cm for asparagus tips.

The maximum length allowed for white and violet asparagus is 22 cm, and for violet/green and green asparagus 27 cm.

The maximum difference in length of shoots packed in firmly bound bundles must not exceed 5 cm.

B. Sizing by diameter

The diameter of shoots shall be measured at the mid-point of their length.

The minimum diameter and sizing shall be:
"White and violet asparagus :

Class	Minimum diameter	Sizing
Extra	12 mm	Maximum variation of 8 mm between the thinnest and the thickest shoot in the same package or the same bundle.
I	10 mm	Maximum variation of 10 mm between the thinnest and the thickest shoot in the same package or the same bundle.
II	8 mm	No provision as to uniformity

Violet/green and green asparagus:

Class	Minimum diameter	Sizing
Extra and I	3 mm	Maximum variation of 8 mm between the thinnest and the thickest shoot in the same package or the same bundle.
II	3 mm	No provision as to uniformity

IV. PROVISIONS CONCERNING TOLERANCES

Tolerances in respect of quality and size shall be allowed in each package for produce not satisfying the requirements of the class indicated.

A. Quality tolerances

(i) *"Extra" Class*

5 per cent by number or weight of shoots not satisfying the requirements of the class, but meeting those of Class I or, exceptionally, coming within the tolerances of that class, or having slight unscarred cracks appearing after harvesting.

(ii) *Class I*

10 per cent by number or weight of shoots not satisfying the requirements of the class, but meeting those of Class II or, exceptionally, coming within the tolerances of that class, or having slight unscarred cracks appearing after harvesting.

(iii) *Class II*

10 per cent by number or weight of shoots satisfying neither the requirements of the class nor the minimum requirements, with the exception of shoots affected by rotting or any other deterioration rendering them unfit for consumption.

In addition to the above, 10 per cent by number or weight can be allowed for hollow shoots or shoots showing very slight cracks due to washing. In no case can there be more than 15 per cent hollow shoots in each package or bundle.

B. Size tolerances

For all classes: 10 per cent by number or weight of shoots not corresponding to the size indicated and deviating from the specified limits with a maximum deviation of 1 cm in length and 2 mm in diameter.

V. PROVISIONS CONCERNING PRESENTATION

A. Uniformity

The contents of each package or each bundle in the same package must be uniform and contain only asparagus of the same origin, quality, colour group and size (if sized).

Nevertheless, with respect to colour, shoots of a different colour group may be allowed within the following limits:

- (a) white asparagus: 10 per cent by number or weight of violet asparagus in Classes "Extra" and I and 15 per cent in Class II
- (b) violet, violet/green and green asparagus: 10 per cent by number or weight of asparagus of another colour group.

In the case of Class II a mixture of white and violet asparagus is allowed provided it is appropriately marked.

The visible part of the contents of the package or bundle must be representative of the entire contents.

B. Packaging

The asparagus must be packed in such a way as to protect the produce properly.

The materials used inside the package must be new, clean and of a quality such as to avoid causing any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials, particularly of paper or stamps bearing trade specifications is allowed provided the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.

Packages must be free of all foreign matter.

C. Presentation

The asparagus may be presented:

- (i) In bundles firmly bound
Shoots on the outside of each bundle must correspond in appearance and diameter with the average of the whole bundle.

In Extra Class, asparagus shoots packed in bundles must be of the same length.

Bundles must be arranged evenly in the package, each bundle may be protected by paper.

In any one package, bundles must be of the same weight.

- (ii) Arranged, but not bundled in the package

VI. PROVISIONS CONCERNING MARKING

Each package¹ must bear the following particulars, in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked, and visible from the outside.

A. Identification

Packer)	Name and address or
and/or)	officially issued or
Dispatcher)	accepted code mark. ²

B. Nature of produce

- "Asparagus" followed by the indication "white", "violet", "violet/green", or "green" if the contents of the package are not visible from the outside and, where appropriate, the indication "short" or "tips" or "mixture white and violet".

C. Origin of produce

- Country of origin and, optionally, district where grown, or national, regional or local place name.

D. Commercial specifications

- Class
- Size expressed:
 - a) for asparagus subject to the uniformity rules as minimum and maximum diameters
 - b) for asparagus not subject to the uniformity rules, as minimum diameter followed by maximum diameter or the words "and over"

¹ Package units of produce prepacked for direct sale to the consumer shall not be subject to these marking provisions but shall conform to the national requirements. However, the markings referred to shall in any event be shown on the transport packaging containing such package units.

² The national legislation of a number of countries requires the explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in the case where a code mark is used, the reference "packer and/or dispatcher (or equivalent abbreviations)" has to be indicated in close connection with the code mark.

- for asparagus packed in bundles or unit packages, the number of bundles or the number of unit packages.

E. Official control mark (optional)

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The UNECE standard for Asparagus
has led to an explanatory brochure published by the OECD Scheme.