



# *The* CHARLOTTE MUSEUM *of* HISTORY

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*Asparagus was a readily available vegetable in the colonial world. We find references or receipts (the 18th century word for "recipe") for soups, side dishes, and even pastries stuffed with this green food. Asparagus is relatively easy to grow and is one of the first fresh foods to be ready for harvest after a long winter.*

## THE ORIGINAL RECEIPT

Here is what Elizabeth Cleland wrote in her *A New and Easy Method of Cookery* in 1755.

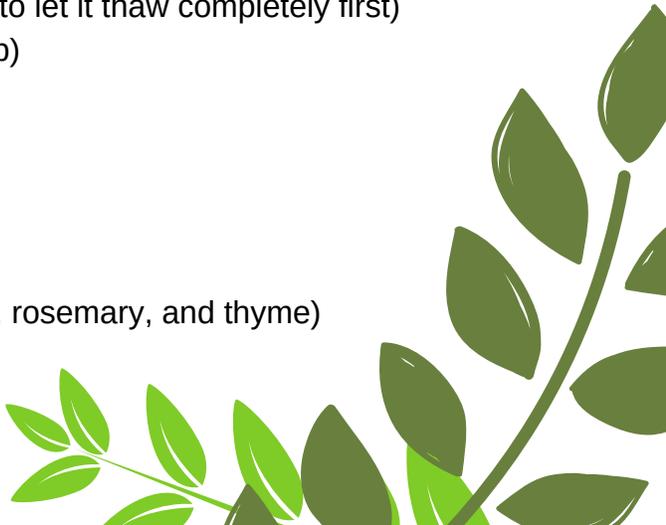
"Take some of the Broth of a Hough of Beef, and green it with the Juice of Spinage, cut half a Hundred of Asparagus, half an Inch long, and boil them in it, with black and Jamaica Pepper, an Onion stuffed with Cloves, and a Bunch of sweet Herbs, thicken it with Flour and Butter, boil it well after you put in the Butter and Flour."

There were no standard spellings or measurements, so it can sometimes be difficult for a modern cook to make sense of what the recipe is asking. The more recipes you read, however, the easier it gets to understand what a colonial cook was doing.

## ADAPTING FOR THE MODERN COOK

Elizabeth lived in a world before electric ovens, microwaves, or grocery stores. She would have cooked over an open fire and would have been limited by what was available and in season at the time.

### INGREDIENTS

- Beef Broth (you can make your own as Elizabeth would have, or you can buy ready made broth from the store)
  - 1 Bunch Fresh Asparagus (if you use frozen, be sure to let it thaw completely first)
  - Juice of 1 to 2 Bunches of Spinach (about 3/4 of a cup)
  - 1 Small Onion
  - Whole Cloves
  - 1/3 Cup of Flour
  - 1/3 Cup of Butter
  - Kitchen Pepper (see recipe below)
  - 1 Bunch of Fresh Sweet Herbs (we recommend sage, rosemary, and thyme)
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Kitchen Pepper is a generic term for a collection of spices. We've included our suggestions below, but you can use what you have available. We recommend making sure to include at least the salt, pepper, and allspice to capture the intended flavors.

**To make Kitchen Pepper:** combine 1/8 teaspoon each of dried ginger, cinnamon, black pepper, nutmeg, allspice, cloves, and salt

## TOOLS

- Large Stock Pot
- Mixing Spoon
- Cutting Board
- Knife
- Measuring Cups & Spoons
- An Adult to Help

## OPTIONAL TOOLS

- Blender
- Cheese Cloth
- Juicer
- Wisk
- Small Sauce Pan

## DIRECTIONS

**Step #1:** Pour the beef broth and the spinach juice (often used in the 18th century to turn liquids green) into a large stock pot.

**Alternative:** You can add the spinach leaves directly to the soup if you would like additional veggies (Lauren does not like cooked spinach so she prefers to add the juice instead).

### Two ways to make spinach juice:

- 1) Use a juicer and have an adult turn 1 to 2 large bunches of spinach into juice.
- 2) Add a few tablespoons of water and one bunch spinach to a blender. Blend until the spinach turns into a watery paste. Use cheese cloth to squeeze the liquid (juice) out of the spinach into a bowl.



**Step #2:** Wash the asparagus and remove the hard ends (usually about an inch or so where the stalk naturally breaks when bent). Then have an adult cut the asparagus into 1/2 inch pieces and add to the pot.



**Step #3:** Remove the outside husk of the onion (all the hard crinkly layers). Take whole cloves and press them into the skin of the onion spacing about an inch or two apart all the way around the onion.



**Step #4:** Add the kitchen pepper, sweet herbs, and onion to the pot.

**Step #5:** Have an adult put the pot on the stove and turn to medium-high heat. Cook for about 20 to 30 minutes or until the asparagus is nice and soft, but not mushy.

**Tip:** Asparagus is done when a fork easily goes into the stalks. You can also do a taste test.

**Step #6:** Add your thickening agent (see note) to the soup and stir to combine it . Then boil for another 3 to 5 minutes to make sure everything is combined well and your soup thickens slightly to the consistency of a thin gravy.

#### **A Note About Thickening Agents:**

Colonial cooks often used whatever they had around to thicken their soups. A few popular thickeners include:

- Crumbling up stale bread and adding it to the soup
- Adding a beaten egg to the soup
- Heating 1/3 cup of butter and 1/3 cup of flour in a small sauce pan, stirring until combined, and then adding the mixture to the soup

**Step # 7:** Serve your soup and enjoy!

