



## Stalking the Green Stalk

KATHY HARRISON OFFERS A FRESH TAKE ON  
SERVING ASPARAGUS

**T**WO YEARS. We were pretty isolated. Masked. I spent a lot of time in the kitchen. And I liked it. The radio or Alexa treated me to news and music while I stirred, chopped, charred, and roasted. I was never one to pour over recipes marked quick or simple. I felt they lacked the nuances of flavor I could only get through long, slow cooking.

And then Daylight Savings Time came, and the sun shone, and we had a couple of 60+ degree days...in March! I shed my heavy coat and went out for a long walk where I noticed the first crocuses pushing their way through the hard soil. I stopped and stared, grinning like a fool. I also got a glimpse of a chipmunk, probably calling his 10,000 relatives to rise out of their tunnels and come on over. Even that couldn't dampen my spirits.

I got home tired and hungry. There was left-over beef bourguignon in the fridge. It took almost a whole day to prepare. It was deep brown, delicious, and complex—a trademark of Julia Child's cooking. I had only to heat it up, pour a glass of red wine, and dig in. But I didn't want it. I wanted something green and vegetal. Something light and bright that I could put on the table relatively quickly. What was this sea change?

They say, "patience is a virtue". It's not one of my virtues. I was hungry. I rummaged around the kitchen and found a nice bunch of asparagus recently purchased. The color alone had me hooked. On the theory that everything good is better on bread, (and bread being almost anything with the big 3...flour, butter, salt), I found a package of puff pastry in the freezer. I set it out on the counter to defrost while I heated the oven. I didn't have any goat cheese, which I thought would be good with asparagus, but I had some Parmesan and ricotta. Also, some crème fraiche. I assembled the tart and put it in the oven to bake while I ate a salad I simply tossed with some oil and vinegar. The tart exceeded my expectations. It was beautiful, both crisp and creamy, vegetal...like spring. We've been inside for so long. It was time to break out. This tart did the trick. 

### Asparagus Tart

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 sheet puff pastry
- 8 ounces asparagus spears (preferably thin stalks)
- 1 cup crème fraiche
- 1 egg
- 1 clove garlic, finely minced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- ½ cup ricotta cheese
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup chopped flat leaf parsley



#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Unfold the defrosted sheet of puff pastry and place on a parchment lined baking sheet. Lightly score the edges of the parchment so that it doesn't puff up while baking. Break off the woody ends of the asparagus and discard. Trim the asparagus so that the spears are the same length and set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine the crème fraiche, egg, garlic, olive oil, and lemon zest. Season with salt and pepper. Spread this mixture within the scored border of the puff pastry. Place the asparagus spears in rows over the crème fraiche mixture. Drizzle with a little olive oil. Drop spoonfuls of ricotta over the asparagus and dust with Parmesan. Bake until the puff pastry is browned and crisp, about 25-30 minutes. Remove from oven and let it rest for 5-10 minutes. Top with minced parsley and another drizzle of olive oil. Cut into wedges and serve.



PHOTO: GIRMANTAS URBONAS

*KATHY HARRISON is a Barrington Hills resident who teaches the fine art of cooking.*

*For more information, call 847-381-4828.*