



## LEMON ROASTED ASPARAGUS WITH BAKED GOAT CHEESE

The part of the asparagus we eat is the young, tender plant shoot — and if eating the most tender, freshest part of a plant's growth was not exotic enough, the short season enhances asparagus's delectability. They are worth looking forward to all year and indulging in fully when in season. Roasting asparagus spears is one of the easiest ways to prepare them and to maintain their fresh flavor and crisp texture. I often crave goat cheese in the spring; the soft texture and sour, tangy flavor is an excellent complement to the juicy, sweet asparagus. This duo makes a nice light meal served alongside crispy bread with olive oil or lettuce with vinaigrette. It can also be served as a first course or as a side dish.

♦ YIELD: 4 SERVINGS ♦

- 2 tablespoons finely chopped chives
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh oregano
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh thyme
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped pecans or walnuts
- 2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 8 ounces soft goat cheese
- Salt
- 1 pound asparagus, tougher stems snapped off
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Combine the chives, oregano, thyme, and pecans in a shallow dish and mix well. Pour 2 tablespoons of the oil into a shallow bowl.
3. If the goat cheese is not already in a log, roll it into a log 1½ to 2 inches in diameter and flatten the ends. Slice the cheese into ½- to ¾-inch-thick disks, making 8 total pieces. *Continued...*

If they crumble or break apart, gently press them back together. One at a time, dip the cheese disks into the oil, then gently press them into the herb mixture, thoroughly coating all sides, and place them on a baking sheet. When you're done, sprinkle the cheese disks with salt.

4. Place the asparagus on a separate baking sheet. Drizzle with the remaining 2 teaspoons oil and the lemon juice, add a sprinkle of salt, and roll them around on the sheet until they are well coated.
5. Put the sheet of asparagus in the oven to bake. After 5 minutes, add the sheet of cheese. Bake for 5 to 6 minutes longer, until the asparagus is bright green and cooked through but still has a nice crunch and the cheese begins to sizzle and the center is soft.
6. Let cool for 3 to 5 minutes and then use a spatula to carefully remove the disks from the baking sheet. Arrange on a platter with the asparagus and serve immediately.

