

Asparagus with Lavender

I love asparagus and now that it's spring fresh Asparagus has hit the markets. You can find the tender stalks at farmer's markets or any grocery store. This dish is quick, easy and great as a side-dish. Or, add a hearty bread and make it the main-dish for a light meal.

2 pounds asparagus
1/4 cup Lavender olive oil
1/4 teaspoon crushed hot-pepper flakes
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 cup pine nuts
1 tsp. dried culinary lavender buds, finely ground
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 pound fresh bocconcini mozzarella balls, quartered
1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

Trim the tough ends of the asparagus stalks. Cook in boiling salted water for 3 minutes or until just tender. Drain and cover with cold water to stop the cooking. Drain and dry with paper towels.

Warm the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the pepper flakes and garlic; stir for 1 minute. Add the pine nuts and saute until nuts just begin to turn color. Add the asparagus and lavender; saute for about 3 minutes, until just heated through. Season with the salt and pepper.

Transfer to a platter and top with the mozzarella; allow the heat from the asparagus to melt the cheese slightly. Sprinkle with the lemon zest and drizzle with lemon juice.

Makes 6 servings

Asparagus Pesto

This is a milder but lovely pesto with a slight bite that goes well with pasta, meat or salad.

Follow the recipe above, cooking asparagus and toasting the pine nuts and spices. Combine all the ingredients, except bocconcini mozzarella balls, in a blender or food processor. Add about 20

fresh basil leaves and process for 2 minutes or until smooth, scraping down sides occasionally. You're done!