Frühlim “strong, healthy, early”

In regions with a moderate climate, white asparagus always develops quickly once the asparagus season has started and its initial production phase is short. In fact, Frühlim production reaches high yield levels before you know it. Another way of ensuring that this type of asparagus can be harvested early is by using mini tunnels or triple covers. High tunnels also allow for the top quality of this variety to shine through. As well as being an early season variety, Frühlim boasts thick spears and tightly closed tips.

After more than 15 years of testing in dedicated fields and at various operational facilities in Germany and the Netherlands, it has been proven that Frühlim can even thrive in many different soil types. Many producers have already come to realise the potential of this variety and they plan to grow it as their only early season asparagus. One key point is that you do not have to worry about the spear thickness of Frühlim declining over subsequent years. The variety is uniform throughout the entire season and its high yields and exceptional quality make it a top choice for the long term. After harvesting, this variety should also be in full leaf, when the 100% male hybrid shows off its dark foliage with tall, upright growth and vigorous development. Frühlim is also fairly resistant to diseases, which is certainly an advantage when it comes to crop protection measures and also means it is suitable for organic farming. What’s more, this asparagus variety has an extremely high tolerance to rust and hollow spears.

Ideally, Frühlim should be planted at a depth of 16–20 cm, with somewhere between 3.5 and 4 plants per metre. When various cultivation techniques are used, including a two-row system, Frühlim is a variety that producers can really rely on. Results have proved to be optimum in sandy/clay soils.
We visited asparagus growers Paul and Josée Vercammen-Broes, whose farm is situated close to the famous Zimmer tower and the wonderful natural beauty of the “Pallieter-Neteland”. Paul has a true passion for asparagus. Paul’s company “Lierse Asperges” is situated in Lier, to the south east of Antwerp.

In 1978, Paul started growing tomatoes under glass. His greenhouses initially covered 5000 m² and were expanded in 1990 to create a surface area of 8000 m².

In 2007-2008 the profitability of tomato growing declined so Paul faced a choice: upscale or choose a different crop.

While debating which crop to grow as an alternative, a colleague brought Paul into contact with asparagus. Paul had absolutely no experience with the crop, so one of the greatest challenges he had was gathering information and increasing his skill levels. Between 2007 and 2008 he visited numerous Belgian and Dutch asparagus growers and followed an asparagus growing training course in Horst.

In 2009 Paul started converting his greenhouse and in March 2010 all the preparations were in place to start planting the asparagus crowns. Little information is available about growing asparagus under glass, so growers have various choices to make concerning which variety to grow and whether to grow in rows in conventional beds or raised beds etc. Paul eventually decided to grow the Backlim variety in raised beds. Producing asparagus in these raised beds is more labour intensive and expensive than growing in traditional rows of beds, but this is compensated for by the ease of harvesting later in the season. Under each roof section of the greenhouse are two raised beds of 0.85 m wide and around 50 m long. Each bed holds two rows of asparagus, which converts to seven plants per m² of surface area in the greenhouse. The irrigation system uses T-tape with two hoses for each bed. Each bed is also equipped with two heating hoses at a depth of around 10 cm below the crown of the plant.

In the first year, the Backlim crowns were planted level with the surface and ridged with soil from the central aisle. After the first year of growth, the beds were filled with a mixture of compost, potting soil and coco-based substrate.

Many years and a wealth of experience richer, Paul has found a routine in his cultivation methods. The soil in the greenhouse starts to be heated around 20 January, when it is taken to a temperature of 18 C°. The temperature of the water in heating pipe is 24 - 25 C°. The first Backlim asparagus are ready for harvesting around Valentine’s day in February. The greenhouse is divided into three sections that can be controlled independently to heat the soil. This creates spread in the harvest. Paul harvests the asparagus for around eight weeks until mid-April. This is followed by the start of the season of field grown asparagus. This means that Paul can supply his customers with asparagus for four months. Paul has also elected to use Backlim for his ‘conventional’ harvest, so he can offer customers consistent quality and flavour.

Paul is quite clear in his reasons for choosing this variety: Backlim is the best variety as far as he is concerned for growing under glass thanks to its long life, good grades and outstanding quality. Quality is an absolute priority for Paul and has undoubtedly contributed to his success. Backlim produces extremely high yields. The yield potential of Backlim is evident in the greenhouse, where yields of 2 kg/m² are more often than not achieved.

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