

# Asparagus Pakoras

A springtime favorite takes on South Asian flair in this crowd-pleasing recipe.

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*Our test kitchen manager and all-around recipe testing whiz Fatima Khawaja pens a weekly column on how to prep the produce du jour, offering unfussy weeknight meal ideas along with useful tips, like how to store and prep those heirloom tomatoes so they really shine. Allowing the season to dictate what's on her plate, Fatima heads to the local farmers market each week to find a star ingredient—rather than one destined to play second fiddle to a meaty main. Focusing on pantry staples, a minimum number of ingredients, and cook times under an hour, this column is your go-to for plant-forward meals.*

Colorful, fresh produce has always inspired me, whether I'm in Pakistan shopping with my mother for turnips and okra, or in Mexico's mercados eyeing the chiles, tomatillos, and hoja santa. So of course, as [New York City's farmers markets](#) burst to life with spring and summer produce, writing a vegetable-focused column is especially exciting. It also feels important to the times we're living in: For those of us trying to eat more fruit and vegetables—not only for our health, but for that of the planet as well—I bring you **In Good Season**: your new go-to source for delicious, unfussy, and simple recipes.

The column's inaugural star is asparagus, one of the first vegetables that turns up when spring arrives. You can find its stalks thick and stubby or long and slender, green or white or even purple—all are delectable in their own right. You'll want to make sure to use fresh asparagus within a day or two of buying it, because its tips can turn slimy, but that won't be difficult because the only real prepwork is trimming away the fibrous root ends. I like to do this by simply bending the stalks to see where the tough end meets the tender top—and that's where I slice down. I love straightforward [sautéed asparagus](#), and since I wanted to keep them whole, crispy, and barely cooked, for this recipe I took things a step further by coating them in a light chickpea batter seasoned with some of my favorite spices and herbs for a market-inspired take on South Asian pakoras.

I grew up eating pakoras, a beloved street food in Pakistan, either just outside the markets with my mother after an evening of shopping, or at home during the month of [Ramadan](#), where they turn up as a reward for fasting. To make them, vegetables like potatoes, eggplant, or spinach and onion are dredged in batter, then fried in bubbling oil. The batter encases the vegetables in a crisp, crackly shell that keeps the star ingredients moist and al dente. Served with [tamarind](#) or [cilantro chutney](#), a squeeze of lemon, or even ketchup, these savory treats are irresistible, impossible to stop at one, or two, or even three. I've definitely eaten a whole platter myself.

Enjoy these asparagus pakoras with friends while entertaining, as a tea-time snack, or just because. Feel free to swap the asparagus out for other vegetables that like being fried, such as onions, eggplant, or my mother-in-law's favorite, green chilis.

Yield: serves 6

Time: 20 minutes

## Ingredients

- 1½ cups chickpea flour (aka gram flour or besan)
- 2 tsp. cumin seeds

- 1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more for sprinkling
- 1¼ tsp. medium-hot red chile powder, such as Kashmiri, plus more to taste
- ⅛ tsp. baking soda
- ½ cups coarsely chopped cilantro
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- 1 lb. asparagus, fibrous ends discarded
- Lemon wedges, for serving
- Tamarind chutney, for dipping (optional)

## Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the chickpea flour, cumin, salt, and chile powder. Slowly whisk in 1¼ cup of lukewarm water, adding an additional ¼ cup water if necessary until the mixture is well combined, has air bubbles, and resembles a thin pancake batter. Whisk in the cilantro.
2. Into a large pot set over medium-high heat, pour the oil to a depth of 2 inches and attach a deep-fry thermometer. When the temperature reads 350°F, dip one asparagus spear into the batter, allowing any excess to drip back into the bowl, and carefully lower it into the oil. Repeat with the remaining spears, working in batches if necessary. Fry, turning occasionally, until golden brown all over, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate, sprinkle with salt, and serve hot with lemon wedges and chutney if desired.