

## One-Pot Pasta & Beans with Asparagus

*Yield* 4 servings | *Prep & cook time* About 30 minutes

8 ounces fresh asparagus (half a bunch), sliced into thin coins  
Olive oil  
½ small-to-medium head fennel or sweet onion, finely diced  
3 cloves garlic, sliced into thin slabs  
½ teaspoon fine sea salt  
¼ teaspoon dried chili flakes  
2 cups cooked beans, plus ¼ cup of its cooking liquid (or a 15-ounce can)  
1 ½ cup small pasta (mini shells, tubetti, macaroni, etc)  
3 cups vegetable broth  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter (optional)  
Freshly grated parmesan or pecorino, for serving (optional)  
Freshly ground black pepper  
Flaky salt  
Chopped mint, parsley, and/or fennel fronds, to garnish

*Rather than snapping off the woody ends of asparagus, here you'll slice as much of the stalk as you can into thin coins — which allows wasting less of this precious vegetable, a trick I learned years ago from a Harold McGee article.*

1. Trim off any white, dried out ends from the asparagus and discard them, then use a sharp knife to cut each spear into thin coins, between ¼ and ⅝-inch thick. Set aside the asparagus tips if you like.
2. Set a deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat and when hot, swirl in a thin film of olive oil. Add the fennel, garlic, chili flakes, and salt, and cook until the vegetables are soft and sweet, 8 to 12 minutes.
3. Add the beans and bean-cooking liquid (or the entire contents of the can) along with the pasta and broth or water. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cover the pan and cook until the pasta is al dente, stirring occasionally to keep the noodles from sticking to the pan — check the package instructions but 10 to 14 minutes is the ballpark.
3. Stir the asparagus and butter (if using) into the pasta, cover the pan, and cook for another minute or two, just until the asparagus is tender. Give another good stir, taste for salt (if you used water instead of broth you'll likely need more salt), then divide among serving bowls. It may seem a little soupy at first, but it thickens rapidly off the heat. Shower each serving bowl with cheese, pepper, flaky salt, herbs, and extra olive oil if you like.