

# Shopper Insights for the Holidays

## What to Know about Asparagus and Traditional Cooking Greens



Over the last five years, produce at retail has grown at a rate of 1.9% annually, but monthly retail volume growth slows in November and December. Some commodities—like asparagus and traditional cooking greens (collard, mustard, and turnip greens)—sell especially well in these months, despite the overall trend. To explore shoppers’ buying behaviors, Robinson Fresh® conducted a survey with U.S. consumers. It revealed insights about their perceptions of asparagus and traditional cooking greens, as well as their purchasing habits.

### GOING GREEN FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Seven of the top 10 volume commodities in retail sales in November have declined in share in the last five years. At the same time, many smaller-share commodities are growing quickly.

While it might not be considered a traditional Thanksgiving or Christmas vegetable, asparagus is among the top volume growth commodities, outpacing others in November and December. Asparagus is already growing rapidly—7.5% retail volume growth annually—but sales growth in November is even faster, at 10.6%.

While the growth trend for traditional cooking greens is slower (1.4% annually), November brings a jump in sales growth, up to 3.8%. Total volume for the category doubles, at a minimum, in this timeframe—across all regions. Much of this comes from organic traditional cooking greens, which have experienced a whopping 28% annual growth in the last five years, compared with conventional traditional cooking greens at 3.6% annual growth.

### Top 10 vegetables driving volume growth<sup>1</sup> IN NOVEMBER OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS



#### MORE INSIDE

Asparagus & traditional cooking greens shopper profile

A look at holiday planning & promotions

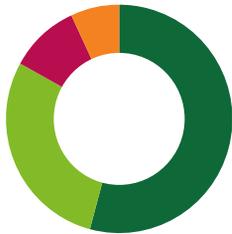
Strategies to drive sales



## Who buys asparagus and traditional cooking greens?

### ASPARAGUS

PURCHASED BY **69% OF SHOPPERS**



**54%** regularly use  
**29%** special occasion  
**10%** requested  
**7%** try it

### TRADITIONAL COOKING GREENS

PURCHASED BY **59% OF SHOPPERS**



**42%** regularly use  
**36%** special occasion  
**11%** requested  
**10%** try it

### 72% prefer bunched asparagus

- But the younger the shopper, the more likely they are to **prefer packaged**—usually a bag over a tray
- If packaged, it's important that it provides a **clear view** of the asparagus so shoppers can easily check the quality of the product (firmness, size, and color)



### Demographics impact purchases

- Purchased by **84% of African American shoppers**; more than 2/3 purchase regularly
- A highly regional purchase; while more than **2/3 purchase in the South**, more than half of shoppers in the Great Lakes and West regions do not



If out of stock, **39% of shoppers will go to another store to purchase asparagus.**

But for shoppers **35 and under, about 50% will go to another store**, and 25% will substitute something else from the same store. Shoppers with the most disposable income are less likely to go elsewhere and will substitute with another item from the same store.



If traditional cooking greens are out of stock, 45% of shoppers will go to another store to purchase, while 43% will select another item from the same store as a substitute.

More than **65% of African American shoppers will head to another store**, compared to 40% of all other ethnicity groups.



# Holiday promotions: It's all in the timing

## ASPARAGUS<sup>2</sup>

While springtime and the Easter holiday are peak promotional times for asparagus, 33% of retailers promote it during any given week in November, which increases to 42% in the week leading into Thanksgiving.

## TRADITIONAL COOKING GREENS<sup>2</sup>

Promotions for traditional cooking greens see a seasonal lift, essentially promoted only during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. But, depending on a store's demographics, shoppers are going to buy them regardless—particularly true for Southeast U.S. markets and those with a high African American population.

### NUMBER OF WEEKS THE AVERAGE RETAILER PROMOTES EACH YEAR

**11**  
WEEKS

**asparagus**



**4**  
WEEKS

**traditional cooking greens**



### Roasted Asparagus with Pesto & Lemon

#### Ingredients

- 1 bunch Green Giant™ Fresh Asparagus
- Olive oil
- 2 C basil
- ½ C pine nuts
- ½ C shaved parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 lemon, quartered

#### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Trim asparagus ends and place a single layer on a baking sheet. Drizzle olive oil over asparagus and season with salt and pepper.
3. Roast asparagus for 12 to 15 minutes.
4. While the asparagus is roasting, blend basil, pine nuts, parmesan cheese, garlic, and salt and pepper in food processor.
5. Plate roasted asparagus. Top with pesto and fresh-squeezed lemon juice; season with salt and pepper.

## 'Tis the season: How shoppers plan meals

Shoppers aren't thinking about commodities independent of one another as they begin planning and shopping for their holiday menus. Instead, they're thinking in terms of a cohesive meal. Another consideration is the changing structure of those holiday meals. Rather than one sit-down meal, many people attend or host several holiday gatherings featuring smaller meals, potluck-style spreads, or hors d'oeuvres.

Starting in September, shoppers begin to plan out their holiday menus and create shopping lists. They're increasingly turning to search engines and social platforms for recipe inspiration, seeking out those that use traditional ingredients in new, healthier, or innovative

ways. Their inquiries continue right up to the day of the holiday, with searches shifting to specific cooking information. Twice as many recipe searches occur during Thanksgiving week than the average week.<sup>3</sup>

Shoppers are proactively planning their holiday meals; retailers should be doing the same with produce.





## 3 opportunities to increase sales

### 1 Serve up cohesive meal solutions in your promotions.

Shoppers think big picture when planning for their holiday meals. Instead of highlighting commodities independent of each other, cross-merchandise to cater to the ways they shop for ingredients. Think beyond the traditional sit-down meal, too—many shoppers serve appetizers and snacks all day long. Promote asparagus and traditional cooking greens as additives to meals—items that can round out a meal or appetizer spread.



### 2 Become a destination for holiday planning and year round recipe inspiration.

Get in front of shoppers early with recipes—including traditional holiday dishes and those with an innovative twist,



healthier versions, or modifications that work for food restrictions and diets. Shoppers are increasingly searching for recipe ideas online, and they're also using the internet to learn how to choose and prepare fresh produce. Be their source of information, and communicate that throughout the year—including the day of the holiday.

### 3 Plan your fresh promotions wisely.

Your marketing dollars could be more wisely and effectively spent by offering price incentives on non-staple items that shoppers are more likely to impulse buy, instead of discounting relatively low-cost items they are likely already planning to buy (like traditional cooking greens). This rings especially true around the holidays, when shoppers are most likely to have predetermined, must-get items.



## About Robinson Fresh

Robinson Fresh brings you fresh food and smart logistics solutions. As a division of C.H. Robinson, a top global third party logistics provider, Robinson Fresh provides year round supply with global to local cold chain expertise and services, as well as world-class account management and impactful category insights. We also provide a comprehensive brand portfolio—with private label, proprietary, and national brands, like Green Giant™ Fresh and Glory Foods®—to help you stand out in a bold, fresh way. This all fuels our innovative supply chain solutions, from seed to shelf.



Following the lead of Green Giant®, a beloved produce brand recognized by over 90% of consumers, Green Giant™ Fresh is the “fresh” branch of this iconic company. Green Giant™ Fresh products provide nutritious and versatile options—like fresh asparagus—to help spark healthier lifestyles for consumers.



Glory Foods® has a rich history of bringing Southern-style recipes and flavors together with quality, convenient, flavorful vegetables. Ready-to-use bagged greens and fresh-cut vegetables offer shoppers a convenient way to include power-packed greens and vegetables in soups, salads, smoothies, and more.

## Let's talk fresh

To discuss Robinson Fresh's capabilities, please reach out to **855-350-0014**

For more information, visit [robinsonfresh.com](http://robinsonfresh.com) or [blog.robinsonfresh.com](http://blog.robinsonfresh.com)



1. IRI 2018  
2. Market Track 2018  
3. Google Trends