In Israel, asparagus is not widely seen in the outdoor markets but, when it is, I am always happy to buy it. There are at least 10 reasons why we should eat more of this vegetable:

1. It contains lots of fibre, making it a good choice if you're trying to lose weight, because your body digests fibre slowly, which keeps you feeling full in between meals. (It is also low in fat and calories: one cup is a mere 32 calories.)

2. It is high in folate, an amino acid aspartagine, making it a natural diuretic. In other words, eating more of the stalk can help flush fluid and salt from your body, which may help prevent urinary tract infections.

3. It is full of antioxidants that could help your body fight free radicals.

4. It contains vitamin E, another important antioxidant, which helps strengthen your immune system and protects cells from the harmful effects of free radicals.

5. It is a natural aphrodisiac, thanks to vitamin B6 and folate.

6. The minerals and amino acids in asparagus extract may help ease stress and protect liver cells from the toxins in alcohol.

7. It is full of vitamin K, crucial for coagulation, which helps your body stop bleeding after a cut, as well as bone health.

8. It boosts your mood because it is full of folate, a B vitamin that can lift your spirits and help ward off irritability. Asparagus also contains high levels of tryptophan, an amino acid that has been similarly linked to improved mood.

9. It's rich in a source of folic acid, providing 22% of the recommended daily allowance of this nutrient.

10. It's full of vitamin C, crucial for coagulation, which helps your body stop bleeding after a cut, as well as bone health.

Sybil Kaplan is a journalist, lecturer, book reviewer and food writer in Jerusalem. She created and leads the weekly English-language Shuk Walks in Machaneh Yehuda, she has compiled and edited nine kosher cookbooks, and is the author of Writings to History: Ten Years as a Woman Journalist in Israel.

MICROWAVED IN LEMON BUTTER DIJON SAUCE
(3-4 servings)

2 1/2 tsp canola or olive oil
1 tsp lemon juice
2 tsp Dijon mustard
1/2 tsp low-sodium soy sauce
1/2 tsp minced garlic
2 tsp minced white onion
salt and pepper

1/2 pound asparagus
chives or green onions for garnish

Arrange asparagus in a microwave steaming bag. Add oil, lemon juice, mustard, soy sauce, garlic, onion, salt and pepper. Microwave four to five minutes, let stand one minute. Place in serving bowl and garnish with chives or green onion.