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## South Europe is early with Vitalim



Since Limseeds introduced Vitalim, this asparagus has completely fulfilled its promises. The South European growing regions, which grow for export, had been calling for years for a variety that combines earliness and production potential. All the forcing techniques used in the Netherlands and Germany have increasingly reduced the export window for South Europe. At the same time, the lack of export volume also means pressure on the domestic markets and ultimately unavoidable low prices for the growers. After years of relative silence on the variety market, Vitalim has set a new standard in the

attractive, early segment. Compared with Grolim, Vitalim is a good two weeks earlier and has a yield potential that is up to 15% higher. Just like all the other varieties from Limseeds, Vitalim is a 100% male variety. This gives a longer production cycle and a homogenous product.

Vitalim plants are raised in South Europe by Cruzel Pépinière ([www.cruzel-pepinieres.com](http://www.cruzel-pepinieres.com)) and Angier Sas International ([www.angier-international.com](http://www.angier-international.com)). A number of Dutch nurseries will also be able to offer Vitalim planting material in 2011.

## The asparagus fly

The asparagus fly is a well-known pest in asparagus cultivation in Europe. The fly can be observed from mid-April until the end of July and is mainly visible on warm, windless days on the unbranched stems just below the growing point of the spear. In the chillier morning hours the fly is less active and is usually easier to detect than later on in the day. The shoots attacked by the larvae of the asparagus fly often grow crooked or twisted to a certain extent, sometimes the growing point is so badly damaged that a type of stunted growth occurs. A cross section of a damaged stem immediately shows the holes eaten away by the larvae. Stems attacked by several larvae will turn yellow after a while and die off. The roots of the plant are not affected.

The fly has just one generation per year. The female lays her eggs (approx. 1.2 mm) in young shoots that have just appeared on the surface of the soil. The emerging larvae eat into the shoot and tunnel their way vertically downwards. After about three weeks the larvae pupate and undergo diapause for about 10 months until the next spring.

One and two year old plots are particularly sensitive as the activity of the fly on these plots coincides with the period of foliage growth. Applying chemical pesticides is mainly aimed at controlling the fly, so it remains vital to keep the pest under control.



## Tunnel vision for an early harvest

In the first weeks of April it's all hands on deck at the Van Rijswijck family farm. On around 10 April, asparagus harvesting took off in a big way! The sunny weather forced the temperature in the inflatable tunnels up to highs of 50 degrees! This heat boost encouraged very high production early in the season.

Van Rijswijck also has 2 hectares of inflatable tunnels with underground heating. Thanks to this method, asparagus can be harvested in Beringe (the Netherlands) with the help of Polish pickers from March. Van Rijswijck has used inflatable tunnels to force the crop since 1997. Today in 2010, they force asparagus on an area that covers 13 hectares.

There are many ways to bring forward the harvest of white asparagus. Earliness is a key topic in European asparagus cultivation. Earliness means the work load is spread and -often- results in higher prices for growers. In Europe the most tried and tested method for white asparagus is the mini tunnel method. Far less familiar is the inflatable tunnel, so this is a good opportunity to learn more about this method.

### How does an inflatable tunnel work?

Inflatable tunnels are not supported by an iron framework, but by underpressure. The tunnel is made of the usual plastic sheeting (thickness 170 µm), plus a fan and bags used as ballast. The sides of the plastic are placed in a trench in the ground and held in place by the ballast. The fan ensures the tunnel stays inflated. Depending on the type of plastic sheeting, the width of the tunnel ranges from 9-11 metres.

The tunnels are constructed in early February and usually dismantled at the end of April. The precise time depends of course on the weather, and when the tunnels are dismantled the market price of asparagus also plays an important role. The investment amounts to around € 2.75 per square metre, and the materials used have a lifespan of around 6-8 years.

### The advantages and disadvantages according to Van Rijswijck

"Compared with mini tunnels you can usually start harvesting 4 to 5 days earlier in the inflatable tunnels. And the pickers are not bothered by any rainfall either". The higher soil temperature results



in a higher kilogram yield in comparison with conventional cultivation methods.

However, there are also some downsides. The sensitivity to wind can result in some tears in the plastic during spring storms, and another disadvantage is the difficulty in controlling the temperature. As soon as the temperature in the tunnel shows the slightest sign of rising, the plastic mulch on the beds is turned around so the white side is on top instead of the black side.

### What varieties do tunnel specialists choose?

Van Rijswijck is quite clear about his preferred variety; "For heated cultivation; Backlim and for the rest Gijnlim". Gijnlim is the most reliable variety for Van Rijswijck; as demonstrated by production levels and quality. The firmly closed tip of Gijnlim is an important factor behind the choice for this variety.

Hans and Marian van Rijswijck think they have more or less reached the maximum limit of the area covered by inflatable tunnels. They may possibly plant some asparagus to grow conventionally to prolong the season. However, alongside asparagus growing, they also run a dairy farm and with 4 young children to bring up this busy couple don't have a lot of time to spare.

## Company information

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Information about varieties developed by us (Avalim, Backlim, Gijnlim, Grolim, Herkolim, Thielim, Vegalim and Vitalim) can be obtained from our variety specialists. They can be reached using the telephone and fax number or email address stated above.

Plant Variety Protection

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