

## Velvet Asparagus Soup

Serves 6

1 large leek (white and pale green parts only), finely chopped (1 1/4 cups)  
1/2 cup finely chopped shallot  
1/4 teaspoon black pepper  
3/4 teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 1/2 lb asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces  
3 1/2 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth  
1 1/2 cups water  
1/2 cup heavy cream

Wash chopped leek in a bowl of cold water, then lift out and drain well. Cook leek, shallot, pepper, and 1/2 teaspoon salt in butter in a 4- to 6-quart heavy pot over moderately low heat, stirring, until leek is softened, about 3 minutes. Add asparagus, broth, and water and simmer, covered, until asparagus is just tender, 10 to 12 minutes. After 2 minutes, remove 6 asparagus tips, halve lengthwise and reserve for garnish.

Purée soup in batches in a blender until smooth (use caution when blending hot liquids). Transfer to a large bowl, then pour through a sieve into cleaned pot. Stir in cream, remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste and heat over moderately low heat until hot.

Ladle soup around custards and garnish with reserved asparagus tips and parmesan curls.

Cooks' note:

- Soup can be made 1 day ahead. Cool, uncovered, then chill, covered.