

QUOTATION

EUELL GIBBONS ON CONDITIONED SEEING

I was walking along the bank of an irrigation ditch, headed for a reservoir where I hoped to catch some fish. Happening to look down, I spied a clump of asparagus growing on the ditch bank, with half a dozen fat, little spears that were just the right size to be at their best. . . . Even when cutting this cluster, I saw another with several more perfect little sprouts. Alerted, I kept my eyes open and soon found another cluster and then another. . . . About this time I noticed that an old, dry, last-year's stalk stood above every clump of new asparagus tips. . . . I sat down on the ditch bank and for five minutes I did nothing but just *look* at one old dry asparagus stalk. It looked very much like the dead weeds and plants that surrounded it, and yet there were differences. The old asparagus plant stood about three feet high and had a central stem or "trunk" about a half inch in diameter which easily distinguished it from weeds with forking stems. . . . After getting the size, color and form thoroughly in my mind, I stood up and looked back along the ditch bank. Instantly, I saw a dozen old dead asparagus stalks that I had missed. I went back to where I had found the first clump and worked my way down the ditch again, and this time I really reaped a harvest. . . . That five minutes I spent [many years] ago, concentrating on one dead asparagus plant, has led me to many pounds of this most delicious of early vegetables. The eye training it gave me has lasted until now. Whenever I drive, in late winter or early spring, my eye automatically picks up the dead asparagus stalks by the roadside, and I make an almost unconscious mental note of the places where the green spears will be plentiful when warm weather arrives.

From: Gibbons, E. (1970). *Stalking the wild asparagus: Field guide edition* (pp. 28-32). New York: David McKay Company.

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