

Beets (*Beta vulgaris*)



Full Sun



Beets and your diet

Beets are one of the most important homegrown vegetables. They are a relatively easy crop to grow, quite resistant to insects and diseases, use little garden space, are reasonably easy to store, and are a good source of vitamins. Beets and beet greens can provide a valuable part of your diet.

The growing and culture of beets

Beets can be grown all over the country, but seem to be particularly adapted to northern sections. They may be grown in the South during the cooler months of late winter and early spring.

Beets prefer a well-drained soil that has been enriched with an application of rotted manure or compost. Hot, dry weather and soil cause beet roots to become stringy and tough. All stones or other obstacles should be removed from the top four inches of soil to allow for good root development.

Plant the seeds in rows approximately three feet apart. With two feet left between plants, 1/2 ounce of seed will sow a 100-foot row. When planting in warm weather, it may be a good idea to soak the seeds for as long as 12 hours. When plants reach two inches in growth, it is time to thin them.

Thinned out plants need not be wasted—replant them in the rows and apply water. In a few days they will look as healthy as the others. To insure the best continuous yield, sow seed every three to four weeks until 90 days before the first frost. Shallow cultivation of weed growth and an occasional dousing of water are the only requirements for healthy beet growth.

Pests of beets

Major beet offenders are the spinach flea beetle, leaf spot and leaf miner. None of these enemies will cause serious damage to plants grown on fertile soil. Crop rotation will discourage disease and infestation.

Harvesting beets

"Baby" beets are harvested when one to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Simply pull the beets out of the ground, but, when removing the tops, leave an inch or two attached to the roots so they will not bleed.

Beets for storage are often left in the ground until just before the first frost. Those being used for long storage should have their tops cut off close to the roots. Remember to separate the diseased and decayed beets from the bunch before storing.

One method of underground storage is to place beets in a plastic basket in a hole three feet deep and four feet square. Place a sheet of plastic on top of the beets, followed by a layer of cornstalks

and straw. Beets can also be stored indoors in a cool, dark cellar if placed in moist sand.

Varieties of beets

There are two types of beets—the early growing and the late or maincrop type. Of the early type which prefer spring planting, Ruby Queen, Early Wonder and Crosby's Egyptian Redhart are popular. Detroit Dark Red matures in about 60 days and produces a fine-grained vegetable. Cylindra is a Danish variety that is long in shape and has a tender quality.

Winter Keeper and Detroit Dark Red are longer maturers and store well through the winter.

The nutritional value of beets

The stems of beets and their greens are high in vitamin A, providing over twice the RDA. The ascorbic acid content is also high and amounts to half of the RDA (22 mg).