

BEETS

Spanish: betabel **Russian:** svekla (свекла) **Vietnamese:** củ cải đường

Beets – also called beetroot, garden beets, or table beets - originated in the Mediterranean. They are thought to have descended from the ‘seabeet’ (beta maritime). Beets have been grown since around the third century. They are popular throughout the U.S. for their flavor and high nutrition content. Beets are part of the Beta vulgaris family and closely related to spinach and chard and sugar beet (grown in the U.S. and processed for use as a sweetener). In Oregon, they are grown nearly year round from March to November. You can find them in many varieties, colors, shapes and sizes; orange, yellow, pink and red; round or cylindrical; large and small. Both the beet and greens are edible and delicious.



FIND OUT MORE:

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/beet.cfm>

<http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/download.asp#beets>

FROM SEED TO PLATE



Beets are annual vegetables, meaning they need to be replanted each year. They are most commonly grown from seed. Sometimes, beet “starts” or small plants are transplanted into the soil.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/beet.cfm>

http://ohioline.osu.edu/b826/b826_2.html

DID YOU KNOW?

A beet seed is actually a cluster of seeds inside a dried fruit. That is why several seedlings grow from each fruit.

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/beet.cfm>

IN THE GARDEN

Beets are fun and easy to grow at preschool or center-based gardens! They are planted early in spring and the seeds are large and fun to look at. Review the tips below for a successful harvest.



SUN: Full Sun



WATER: Regular water



SOIL: Beets grow well sandy soils with good aeration. They thrive in soils with good drainage and uniform soil moisture.



SEEDS: Beet seeds are fun to look at and easy to plant: place each seed 1/2 to 3/4 inch deep in rows 18 to 24 inches apart.



PLANT: Plant in early spring. Beets can withstand frost and can be planted 30 days before the last frost date for the area and continued through mid summer. While the plants prefer warmer weather, the seeds prefer cooler. They are best as an early season and fall crop.



SPACE: Each plant needs enough soil space to grow to maturity. As the seedlings come up, thin them to be 1-3 inches apart.



CARE: Be sure to keep the garden bed weeded, especially when plants are young and establishing themselves.



HARVEST: While beets can be harvested at any stage depending on your preferred size, typically harvesting occurs at ~ 60 days. They will quickly increase in size if left in the soil, but left for too long, they will become tough and fibrous. Keep your eyes out for the 'crowning' of the beet as it begins to emerge from the soil. At 60 days, remove a plant by pulling gently on the greens. If a larger size is desired and there is ample space for them to grow, leave them in the ground and continue checking.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/beetch.html#storage>
<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/beet.cfm>

STORAGE AND HANDLING

- Roots should be reasonably dry and free of soil for best results.
- Look for smooth, hard, and round beets that are free of cuts and bruises.
- Oversized roots may be woody.
- If greens remain, avoid wilted or browned leaves. However, even with wilted leaves, roots are likely still delicious.
- Remove the green tops from beets and store each in separate, unsealed plastic bags.
- Topped beets can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 4-8 weeks. However, cook the green tops within one to two days.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/beetch.html#storage>
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/5510.pdf>

IN THE KITCHEN

Beets can be eaten in a variety of delicious ways: raw in salads, roasted in the oven, sautéed, steamed, or boiled. Time for preparation depends on the method used - they can be done in a snap when eaten raw, and will take an increasingly longer amount of time as you either steam, roast, or boil them.

Before preparation, rinse beets well to make sure there are no dirt spots remaining. Peel and grate beets to top salads or to add to sandwiches. If roasting or boiling, poke a few holes in the beets and cook with the peel on – once cooked and cooled, the skin slides off easily. To roast, cut beets to resemble orange wedges, toss to coat with olive oil, rosemary, salt and pepper, and bake at 400 for 30-40 minutes. Or, drop whole beets into boiling water for 40 minutes, or until a fork enters it without force, peel and slice to dress and add to salads, or eat with a simple sauce.

Try the classroom recipe at home, with this family-size version:

RAINBOW CRUNCH SALAD (Beet and Carrot Salad with Citrus Dressing)

Serves 4-6

INGREDIENTS

Dressing:

1/4 tsp. grated fresh ginger, grated

1 Tbsp. honey or brown sugar

Juice of 1 large lemon (2-3 Tbs.)

Juice of 1/2 large orange (2-3 Tbs.)

1/4 tsp. salt or to taste

Vegetables:

3/4 pound carrots (mix of colors, if possible), grated

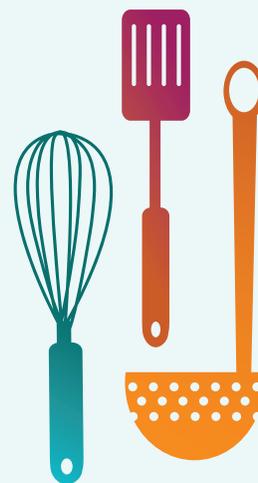
3/4 pound raw beets, grated

DIRECTIONS

Make dressing: Measure lemon and orange juices into a medium bowl. Add grated ginger and honey/brown sugar and whisk to combine. Add 1/4 tsp. salt, or to taste.

Make salad: Add grated carrots to the bowl and stir to combine. Add beets and mix lightly. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

** Adapted from Alison Forrest, Food Service Director, Huntington, VT*



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The family newsletter for beets can be sent home at the beginning of the month. The newsletter is available in English, Spanish, and Russian. Print the first page only, or add photos and stories to the second page and print both sides for families.



GET PARENTS' ATTENTION!

- Attach the newsletter to the child by attaching a string of yarn to the paper and making a newsletter “necklace” or pinning the newsletter to an article of clothing.
- Attach the newsletter to a drawing or other piece of artwork created by the child
- Get a set of “Ask me about ____” stickers or nametags, or use blank nametag stickers to draw attention to the fruit or vegetable of the month. Send each child home with an “Ask me about beets!” sticker for the beet month.
- Offer tastes of the recipe of the month at a parent meeting, or when parents pick up their children from your site.

BEET VARIETIES

Red • Golden (Orange) • Chioggia



ABOUT HARVEST FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Harvest for Healthy Kids is a nutrition program designed to introduce children to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables through their meals and snacks and classroom activities. Monthly family newsletters engage families as partners in helping children to develop healthy eating habits. Harvest for Healthy Kids is a partnership between Mt. Hood Community College Head Start and the School of Community Health at Portland State University.