



There seems a love-hate relationship with the beet.

WE LOVE THEM.

Brian Sebade

Vicki Hayman

Beets seem loved or hated. Those who enjoy beets can't seem to get enough, while those who dislike beets compare their taste to dirt.

Luckily, there are many varieties of beets to satisfy palates, coming in many different shapes, sizes, and colors – even pink.

Wyoming's climate and soils are well-suited for beets, and sugar beets are a major agricultural crop in the state. The leaves and roots of table beets are edible, making them a valuable crop for vegetable gardeners.

Most beets for the dinner table are harvested when several inches in diameter, yet beets used for animal feed or fodder can weigh more than 20 pounds.

Beets generally have a relatively short number of days to maturity, making them ideal for short growing seasons. Beets can be planted at intervals throughout the growing season to provide new crops of beets.

Beets are biannual plants producing leaves and a taproot during the first year of growth and seeds during the second growing season. Beet roots are harvested for consumption in the first year of their lifecycle. To harvest seeds, keep beets alive over winter.

Beets should not be planted too close together or too deep to avoid poor production. Beets enjoy soils high in nutrients and do well following legumes such as peas and beans. Beets also have relatively few disease and pest issues, making them great for the garden. Like most vegetable crops, beets should be used in a crop rotation system to avoid nutrient and potential disease and pest issues.

Selecting and Storing Beets

Beets are sweetest and most tender during their peak season, from June to October. When selecting, look for firm, small- to medium-sized beets that have a uniform, smooth skin and deep color. Pass over any that are over-mature and large, cracked, shriveled, or look very dry. If the beet greens are still attached at the root, they should be fresh looking, deeply colored, and crisp.

Cut off the greens leaving at least a 1-inch portion of the stems still attached. Greens will only last a few days in the refrigerator and should be used right away. Slightly limp greens can be restored to freshness if stored in the refrigerator in water.

Store beets unwashed. Place the root of the beet (remove greens first) in a plastic bag and store in the vegetable crisper drawer of the refrigerator for up to three weeks.

Wash the roots and leaves to remove soil before using. Be careful to avoid breaking the skin when washing beet roots. Breaks and tears allow color and nutrients to escape.

Preparing Beet Roots

Beets are firm, crunchy, and mildly sweet tasting when eaten raw. Raw beets need only be scrubbed and grated or sliced as thinly as possible. They make an excellent addition to smoothies, juices, or salads.

Beets take on a softer and sweeter taste once cooked. Beets are often paired with cheeses like goat cheese, balsamic vinegar that balances their sweetness, and arugula, which adds a nice peppery counterbalance to the beet's earthy and sweet taste.

Beets can be baked, boiled, microwaved, roasted, sautéed, steamed, or pickled. Steaming or roasting beets are the healthiest ways to retain their nutrients. Beets contain more natural sugar than any other vegetable, about 9 grams per serving, so people trying to limit their sugar intake should not overdo it

(see nutrient information page 21). The high sugar content gives them a naturally sweet taste and makes them ideal for roasting where their sugars have the chance to caramelize.

Leave at least 1-inch of stem attached when boiling beets and don't peel them until after cooking. Beets should be cooked with their peel and stem to preserve nutrients and to prevent their deep red color from leaking out, which turns them brown, making them unappetizing in appearance. Adding an acid, such as lemon juice or vinegar, to the pot can also help preserve the color of the beets.

Beets are cooked through and ready when easily pierced with a fork. After cooking, the skin can be rubbed away while wearing gloves. Always be careful working with beets, as their juices tend to stain countertops, cutting boards, sinks, hands, and clothes! Rub salt or lemon juice over your hands to remove stains from the skin.

Big Nutritional Benefits

You can't beet the benefits! The unique set of pigment antioxidants in the root and the nutrient-rich greens make beets very nutritious. A one-cup serving has about 58 calories and many nutrients. Beets are an excellent source of folate and manganese. They are a good source of potassium, copper, magnesium, and fiber.



