

BEET

Vegetable Fact Sheet #3
WSU Extension Kitsap

Garden beet is a popular garden vegetable; beet tops are an excellent source of vitamin A, and roots are a good source of vitamin C. The tops are cooked or served fresh as greens and the roots may be pickled for salads or cooked whole, then sliced or diced. The garden beet is closely related to Swiss chard, sugar beet and mangel. Mangels (also known as stock beets) are considered too coarse for human consumption but are grown for stock feed.

Recommended Varieties

Round

- Early Wonder (52 days; flattened globe shape; dark red, sweet and tender)
- Lutz Green Leaf (70 days; an heirloom winter-keeper type; purplish red exterior, deep red interior; large, glossy green tops, excellent for greens; roots stay tender even when large; stores extremely well)
- Red Ace (55 days; excellent quality; early; round, tender, sweet, fine-grained, attractive, uniform roots)
- Pacemaker III (55 days; even colored round roots; deep red; resistant to downy mildew and cercospora leaf spot)

Mini

- Kestrel (53 days; very smooth round beet, dark red, very tender)
- Little Ball (50 days; very uniform, small size; good shape; very tender; grows quickly to form smooth roots)
- Little Mini Ball (54 days; roots the size of a silver dollar at maturity; round; canned whole; short tops good for greens)

Specialty

- Cyndor (60 days; long, cylindrical; all slices of equal diameter)
- Chioggia (65 days; Italian heirloom; rounded, candy red exterior; raw interior banded red and white; sweet, mellow flavor; bright green tops, mild and tasty; germinates strongly and matures quickly; does not get woody with age)
- Golden (60 days; buttery color, sweet mild flavor)
- Albina Verduna (65 days; round, all white beet, extremely sweet; tops superior for greens)
- Bull's Blood (65 days; deep red and white banded flesh with a clean, crisp flavor; excellent greens)

When to Plant

Beets are fairly frost hardy and can be planted in the garden 30 days before the last frost of the season. Although beets grow well during warm weather, the seedlings are established more easily under cool, moist conditions. Start successive plantings at 3 to 4 week intervals until midsummer for a continuous supply of fresh, tender, young beets. Irrigation assures germination and establishment of the later plantings.

Spacing and Depth

The beet "seed" is actually a cluster of seeds in a dried fruit. Several seedlings may grow from each fruit. Some seed companies are now separating the seed for precision planting, by dividing the fruit. Plant seeds about ½ inch deep and one inch apart. Allow 12 to 18 inches between rows. The seedlings may emerge over a relatively long period of time, making a stand of different sizes and ages of seedlings. Some gardeners find that placing a board over the row after planting preserves the soil moisture and eliminates crusting from hard rains. The board must be removed as soon as the first seedling starts to emerge.

Care

Frequent shallow cultivation is important because beets compete poorly with weeds, especially when small. Because beets have extremely shallow roots, hand weeding and early, frequent and shallow cultivation are the most effective methods of controlling weeds in the rows. Deep cultivation after the weeds are large damages the beet roots. Like most root crops, beets need a fertile soil (especially high in potassium) for vigorous growth. Keep your beet plants uniformly supplied with moisture for best performance.

Harvesting

Beets can be harvested whenever they grow to the desired size. About 60 days are required for beets to reach 1 ½ inches in diameter, the size often used for cooking, pickling or canning as whole beets. Beets enlarge rapidly to 3 inches with adequate moisture and space. With most varieties, beets larger than 3 inches may become tough and fibrous. Beets may be stored in a polyethylene bag in a refrigerator for several weeks. Cut off the tops of the beets one inch above the roots. Beets store best at 32°F and 95% humidity. Do not allow them to freeze.

Selection and Storage

Beets can be harvested at any stage of development, from the thinning to the fully mature stage at about 2 inches in diameter. The "thinnings" are beets that have been pulled from the ground prematurely to make room for others when rows are overcrowded. Thinnings can be eaten raw, tops included, in salads or roasted. Beets are high in natural sugar and roasting brings out the natural sweetness.

Beets vary in color and shape based on variety. The most common is the deep maroon globe-shaped beet. There is an Italian variety which has pink and white rings upon slicing. The golden globe is globe-shaped and orange in color then it turns golden yellow when cooked. Another variety is white and still another is pink.

When harvesting beets, separate the green tops from the roots leaving an inch of stem on the beet. Beets larger than 3 inches in diameter are often fibrous and woody. Beet greens are packed with nutritional value but must be prepared separately. Upon storage, the greens will quickly draw the moisture from the root greatly reducing flavor and the beets will become shriveled. Leave on inch stem and the taproot intact to retain moisture and nutrients. After separating, beets store well for about a week in perforated plastic bags in the refrigerator. Use beets while they are still firm and fresh.