

Veggie of the Month

Beets!

Beets are best known for their sweet, earthy-tasting roots, but you can eat the leaves, too. The roots are usually a rich purple-red, but white or gold beets are available-and there are even bicolor with inside rings of white and magenta. All beets have edible foliage, but some have more-tender, milder-tasting leaves than others. The leaves can be chopped and added to soups and stews, and in any dish that calls for “greens”.

Beets can be sown directly in your garden. Soaking seeds in tepid water for several hours or overnight will improve germination. Prepare the soil as you do for carrots, digging and loosening it 12-16 inches deep and adding 1 cup of bone meal per 4-foot row of plants. Space the seeds 2 inches apart in rows about 7 inches apart. Thin the seedlings to 4 inches apart when they reach about 3 inches high.

Keep the soil evenly moist but not soggy-just slightly moist to the touch. Don't let the soil dry out. This will prevent the roots from cracking.

Snails and slugs love beets as much as we do! Be vigilant about picking them off, and/or applying a good organic repellent like Sluggo Plus as needed.

The roots are tastiest when picked young as baby beets-when they are no more than 1.5-2 inches across. They are ready to harvest any time after the shoulders come above the soil line. Twist off the leaves, and handle the delicate roots carefully to avoid damaging them. It will also help to prevent their color from bleeding when cooked.

Boil or bake the roots until they are tender, and peel off the outer skin. Serve either hot or cold. They are also popular for pickling. You can grate baby beets and eat them raw in a salad-they have a strong, sweet, earthy flavor. Young leaves are delicious in salads too. Cook the older greens as you would spinach. They taste similar to Swiss chard.

Health Benefits of Beets

Beets are very low in calories (45 calories per ½ cup), and contain zero cholesterol and a very small amount of fat. The nutrition benefits come from fiber, vitamins, minerals, and plant derived anti-oxidants.

The root is a rich source of phytochemical compound, *glycine betaine*. Betaine has the property of lowering *homocysteine* levels within the blood. High levels of *homocysteine* in blood result in the development of coronary heart disease, stroke and peripheral vascular diseases.

Top Seed Picks

‘Chioggia’, ‘Bull’s Blood’, ‘Boro’, ‘Touchstone Gold’, ‘Golden Eckendorf’,
Mammoth Red Mangel’, ‘McGregor’s Favorite’

Roasted Beets with Balsamic Glaze

Cook time: Approx. 1 hour, 15 minutes

Yield: Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds red beets, medium sized, scrubbed clean, green tops removed
- Olive oil
- Salt
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest
- Freshly ground black pepper

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a roasting pan with aluminum foil. Place beets in the pan. Rub olive oil over the beets, sprinkle with salt. Cover the beets with another sheet of aluminum foil. Roast for 1 to 2 hours, depending on the size of the beets and how old they are. After 1 hour, test every fifteen minutes by poking a beet with a fork. Once the fork goes in easily, the beets are tender and cooked. Remove from oven.
2. While the beets are cooling, prepare the balsamic glaze. In a small, shallow sauce pan, add the balsamic vinegar and sugar. Heat on high until the vinegar has reduced to a syrup consistency. Remove from heat.
3. After the beets are cooled for several minutes, but are still warm to the touch, peel off the outer skins and discard. Cut the beets into quarters or more, bite-sized pieces.
4. Place beets in a serving bowl. Pour balsamic glaze over the beets. Stir in grated orange zest, and add salt and pepper to taste.

Garnish with a little orange zest to serve.

