

Beets

Beta vulgaris



An annual, cool season crop that is rich in iron, and has a unique earthy flavor. Beets can become tough and woody in hotter weather. Their roots come in colors of red, gold and striped, with the latter two being sweeter. The greens are also edible and rich in calcium. Beets are easy and best grown from seed directly sown in the ground. Grows well with bush beans, lettuce and brassicas and in

SITE REQUIREMENTS

Beets require full sun (at least six hours of direct sun) for good root development. Partial shade (at least four hours of direct sun) is sufficient for greens production. Beets prefer average well drained soil with a pH between 5.8-7.0. Most soils should be amended with at least 1" of compost and lime before planting.

PLANTING

As with all root crops, beets are best grown from seed. Begin planting four weeks before the last frost date. Ideal planting times in Portland are April through June and then in September for fall and winter harvest. Plant seeds ¼" deep in rows 18-24" apart. You may want to cover newly planted beets with floating row cover to prevent leaf miner and flea beetles. After 1-2 weeks thin seedlings so plants are 2" apart. In another 2 weeks thin plants to 4" apart. The plants pulled at this time will yield edible baby beets!

Beets can transplant from starts as well. Be sure to disturb the roots as little as possible and avoid pot bound plants. Water in transplants with a liquid seaweed mixture.

WATER REQUIREMENTS

Beets prefer consistent, evenly moist soil. Avoid overhead irrigation to help avoid fungal diseases. Uneven watering can lead to pithy white rings in the roots.

FERTILIZING

Beets are heavy feeders that especially love phosphorus. You can scratch in an all purpose organic fertilizer in the bottom of the rows before planting the seed. Side dress seedlings every 2-3 weeks with the same fertilizer until greens are 4-5" tall.

HARVESTING & STORAGE

Beet greens are the tenderest when harvested young. Older greens are fabulous steamed or sautéed like spinach or chard. Baby beet roots can be harvested 4 weeks after planting. Full sized beets are dug when roots are 1-2" in diameter. Roots can become tough and woody when they get larger than 4" in diameter. Beet roots that are topped can store at 32°F 4-7 months when they are topped. Canning, freezing and drying are also great ways to store your beet crop.

PESTS & DISEASES

*Damping-off occurs in cool wet weather and prevents seedlings from emerging or seedlings dying off. Replant new seeds in an area with better drainage, or add more compost and wait for warmer weather.

*Cutworm can often mow down all of your seedlings in one night. Spinosad is an organic control for cutworms. Nematodes can help control the larvae.

*Leaf miners are very common in beet leaves. Typically damage appears as beige or white trails scrolling throughout the leaves. Leaf miners are tiny insects between the leaf tissues. The best control is to pick off all infected foliage at the first signs of miner trails. Cover your beds at planting time to prevent leaf miners. Horticultural or neem oil can smother eggs.

*Aphid damage often appears as curled, twisted, yellow leaves. You may find colonies of green to yellow aphids on the undersides of the leaves and growing tips. Also, sticky sap on leaves and stems and white aphid skeletons are quite prevalent. There are numerous sprays and control measures to help combat aphids.

*Flea beetles chew dozens of tiny holes in the leaves. For prevention cover new seed beds with floating row cover until plants are 8" tall. Dust with diatomaceous earth or spray with pyrethrin.

*Mildews appear as white patches, preceded by reddish patches, on the leaves and stems. Both downy and powdery mildew are fungal diseases. Downy mildew can also cause roots to be misshapen with rough, cracked skin. First remove as much of the infected areas as possible. There are numerous fungicides listed for edibles, such as Serenade, that can prevent the spread of powdery mildew.

*Root rot may appear as pale or yellowing leaves and stunted plants. Roots will be dry and black at the center. It is a soil fungus initiated by overwatering and/or very heavy soil. There is no recovery from root rot. Amend soil with at least 2" of compost and allow the area to become slightly dry between waterings to avoid root rot.

*Snails and slugs leave large holes in leaves when they feed at night. They often leave iridescent trails on leaves and ground. Slug baits, and beer traps are just a few ways to control them.

*Cercospora leaf spot appears tan spots with red edges on the leaves. Wet warm weather encourages this fungus. Avoid overhead irrigation and treat with a fungicide listed for edibles such as Serenade

*Beet curly top virus causes leaves to be small and curl upward and become crinkled. The virus is transmitted by leaf hoppers and has no cure. Remove infected plant and debris. Replant beets in a new area.

*Scab is a fungus that causes corky areas on the roots. The roots are still edible (simply cut out infected areas) but they will not store. The fungus can overwinter on dried leaves and roots so be sure to clear all beet material from the bed.

VARIETIES

*Bull's blood-Grown primarily for striking dark red-purple leaves that provide incredible contrast in salad mixes and also have a tender, sweet flavor. Roots are also tasty and tender when harvested early. Tolerant of heat and cool temps. 65 days.

*Chioggia-An Italian variety with light red roots and interior flesh of alternating rings of white and red. A sweeter milder taste than red beets. Mature in 65 days.

*Cylindrical- Red, elongated roots require well amended soil. Sweeter than some round red varieties, and easier to handle in the kitchen. Slower to mature than round beets.

*Early Wonder- A popular red variety suitable to all seasons. Vigorous growth in cool soils and staggered maturity allows for a long harvest season. Average days to maturity is 60 days.

*Golden- Delicious color and mild sweet flavor of these beets adds plenty of pizzazz to many dishes. A lower germination rate, therefore sow seeds thick. Matures in 60 days.

*Shiraz Tall Top-Grown for its superior greens which are especially tender. Roots yield classic red globes.

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