By MARIE IANNOTTI | Updated on 04/20/22
Reviewed by KATHLEEN MILLER

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The beet plant (*Beta vulgaris*) is a fast-growing vegetable that can be grown just about anywhere. Although beets are known as a root crop, all parts of the beet plant are edible. Tender beet greens can be harvested when thinning a row of beets, and mature leaves make good greens when it's time to pull up the whole plant. The most commonly known root beets are red, but golden and striped varieties are also available.

Beets are a cool-season vegetable crop, so you might be able to get both an early crop planted in the spring as well as a crop planted in the summer or fall. Most beet varieties are ready to harvest about two months after planting.

Common Name	Beet, beetroot
Botanical Name	*Beta vulgaris*
Family	*Amaranthaceae*
Plant Type	Annual, vegetable
Size	12–18 in. tall, 18–24 in. wide
Sun Exposure	Full sun, part sun
Soil Type	Loamy, moist, well-drained
Soil pH	Acidic, neutral (6.0–7.0)
Bloom Time	Seasonal
Hardiness Zones	2–11 (USDA)
Native Area	Europe

How to Plant Beets

When to Plant

When planting in the spring, wait until the soil has warmed to at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit. You can sow successive plantings roughly

or fall, be sure to leave at least a month before your first expected frost from your last seeding. In warm climates, you might even be able to plant in the fall for a winter harvest.

Selecting a Planting Site

Beets are easy to grow from seed in the ground or in containers. They need a sunny spot with good soil drainage. Aim to plant them somewhere away from Swiss chard and spinach, as the plants are relatives susceptible to the same pest and disease issues.

Spacing, Depth, and Support

Plant seeds about 1 to 2 inches apart, and space rows about a foot apart. The seeds should only be about 1/2 inch deep. When seedlings reach 3 to 4 inches tall, thin them to around 4 inches apart. A support structure won't be necessary.

Beet Plant Care

Light

Beets prefer to grow in full sun, meaning at least six hours of direct sunlight on most days. However, they can tolerate some light shade.

Soil

A light, rich, well-draining soil with a slightly acidic to neutral pH is best. Rocks, clay, weeds, and anything else that can interfere with root development should be removed. Moreover, beets need boron in the soil to prevent black heart, a condition that causes deformed leaves and corky black spots on the roots. You can provide boron by using compost or seaweed extract as a soil amendment.

Water

Provide at least 1 inch of water every week. Mulching will help to keep the soil from drying out and getting too warm.

Temperature and Humidity

between 50 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit are ideal. Humidity also typically isn't an issue as long as proper soil moisture is maintained and there's air flow around the plants to help inhibit fungal growth.

Fertilizer

If your soil is not rich in organic matter, supplemental feeding will be necessary starting about two weeks after the beets emerge. Any good vegetable fertilizer will do, following label instructions.

Pollination

Beets are primarily pollinated by the wind, with flowers not appearing until the plant's second year as it completes its life cycle. As most gardeners grow beets as annuals, not biennials, pollination is not a factor.

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are relatively temperamental when growing.

- 'Chioggia' is an heirloom beet with concentric red and white circles.
- 'Detroit Dark Red' is great for fresh eating or canning and pickling.
- 'Mini Ball' produces individual-sized beets and is great for growing in containers.

Beets vs. Radishes

Radishes and beets look like they could be varieties of one another. However, they are two entirely different species. While both are round and typically red or purple in color, beets are generally much larger than radishes. Beets also have a bumpier texture. Taste-wise, beets have a bittersweet, earthy flavor while radishes are more peppery.

Harvesting Beets

Beets take around 55 to 70 days after planting to mature. You can start harvesting beet greens once the plants reach around 3 to 4 inches tall. The greens are most tender before they reach 6 inches, and they can be eaten raw or cooked. Be sure to leave some leaves on the plants, as they're necessary for root development. Beetroots are ready to harvest when they're around 1 1/2 to 2 inches in diameter. Larger roots will be tougher and more fibrous.

Harvest the beetroots by loosening the soil and gently pulling them out. Leave at least 1 inch of the stem to avoid bleeding during cooking.

Beets are ideal root cellar vegetables and can be stored for three to four months packed in sand or sawdust in a cool, dry spot. Beets can also be canned, pickled, or frozen. Fresh beets will keep in the refrigerator for up to a week.

containers. And container growth is a good option if you don't have the garden space or the right soil conditions to successfully grow beets. The pot should be at least 12 inches deep and 12 to 24 inches wide across the top. Make sure it has holes in the bottom to provide good drainage. Small varieties of beets, including 'Mini Ball' and 'Baby Ball', do particularly well in containers.

Pruning

Pruning isn't necessary for beet plants beyond thinning seedlings and trimming off leaves as needed to eat. Also, trim off any broken leaves that are dragging on the ground, as they can introduce pests and diseases to the plant.

Propagating Beets

Beets are one of the many vegetables than can be propagated via scraps. This is an inexpensive, quick, and easy way to get a second harvest of leaves. However, you won't get bulb regrowth from it. Here's how:

01 Remove the leaves from the beet, and use them for cooking. Also, remove most of the beetroot, but save the top part (no more than a third of the beet overall).

02 Put the top part in a shallow dish of water with the cut side facing down. Place the dish by a sunny window.

03 Change the water every day or two. You should see new leaf growth in a few days.

04 Start harvesting leaves in about a week as needed. The beet will keep growing leaves for several weeks.

How to Grow Beets From Seed

The beet seeds that come in packets are really clumps of four to six seeds. You can plant the whole clump and thin the seedlings when they are a few inches tall, or you can try to separate the clumps into individual seeds before planting. The safest way to do this is to gently run a rolling pin over the clumps—but be careful not to crush the

them at the soil line with scissors or shears; do not pull them up.

Beet seeds can be slow to germinate because of their tough outer shell. Soaking the seed clusters overnight will help to soften the shell and speed germination. Germination will take about a week in soil above 50 degrees Fahrenheit or up to three weeks in cooler soil.

Potting and Repotting Beets

A potting mix formulated especially for vegetables is ideal for beets. It's best to pot beets in a container that will accommodate their mature size to avoid having to repot. That way, you won't have to disturb the sensitive roots.

Overwintering

Beets are most commonly grown as annuals, so no overwintering is necessary. In zones 9 and above, they often can be grown over the winter months.

Common Pests and Plant Diseases

Many of the common problems with beets are shared by other root vegetables, such as potatoes. In addition to black heart, caused by a boron deficiency (described above), be on the lookout for:

- Bacterial infections: A variety of soil bacteria can cause discolored spots on leaves, which can gradually infect the roots. Affected plants should be removed, and rotate crops the next season. Do not plant beets in garden space previously occupied by potatoes.
- Viral infections: Various viruses, often transmitted by leafhopper insects, can cause twisted, distorted leaves. Combat viruses by planting resistant varieties and fighting leafhoppers with pesticides.
- Fungal infections: Similar to bacteria, fungal infections cause small brown or gray spots to cover the leaves. To prevent, rotate crops every two to three years. At the first sign of infection, apply

the above-ground foliate to wilt, as though in need of water, while the underground roots begin to rot away. Root rot tends to appear in cycles; two or three disease-free years might be followed by a bad season where many plants are affected. Root rot can be minimized by keeping your garden weed-free and by avoiding overwatering. Affected plants should be removed.

- Insect pests: Watch for leaf miners, leafhoppers, flea beetles, aphids, and caterpillars. Pests usually are identified by ragged holes left when they feed on leaves. Use an appropriate pesticide, or pick off pests by hand.

FAQ

Are beets easy to grow?

Beets are fairly easy to grow in loose soil and mild temperatures.

How long does it take to grow beets?

Beets typically mature in 55 to 70 days after planting.

Do beets come back every year?

Although beets are technically biennials, completing their life cycle in two growing seasons, most gardeners grow them as annuals and harvest them in the same growing season.

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