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Beets



Photo Credit: Darasp Kran/Shutterstock

Botan *Beta*
Name: *vulgaris*

Plant [Vegetable](#)
Type:

Sun [Full Sun](#) ,
Expos [Part Sun](#)

Soil [Slightly](#)
pH: [Acidic to](#)
[Neutral](#)

Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Beets

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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A staple in our gardens, beets grow easily and you won't have to wait long to harvest their tasty roots. You can eat their green tops, too, so they're a dual-purpose crop! Learn all you need to know about growing beets—from planting to harvest.

About Beets

Beets—or “beet roots”—are a colorful, cool-season crop that is easy to grow from seed in well-prepared soil and grows quickly in full sun.

They are a great choice for northern gardeners because they can survive frost and near-freezing temperatures. This also makes them great as a fall crop.

If you are a beginner, look for bolt-resistant varieties, which have less of a chance of bolting (maturing too quickly) in warm weather. There are many different varieties of beets, showcasing deep red, yellow, white, or striped roots of different shapes.

Beet roots can be harvested from the time they're about the size of a golf ball to the size of a tennis ball; larger roots may be tough and woody. Plus, beet greens have a delicious and distinctive flavor and hold even more nutrition than the roots!

Read Next

- [How to Grow Beets from Sowing to Harvesting](#)
- [10 Easiest Vegetables to Grow at Home](#)
- [Five Fresh Greens to Grow All Year Round](#)

PLANTING

Choose a planting site that gets full sun. Beets should ideally receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day.

Beets grow best in well-prepared, fertile soil, but will tolerate average to low soil fertility. A [soil pH](#) between 6.0 and 7.0 is best and slightly alkaline (7.0+) soils can be tolerated. Beets will not tolerate acidic soils (pH below 6.0). To allow the round beet roots to develop properly, soil should be free of rocks and other obstacles.

Avoid planting beets where [Swiss chard](#) or [spinach](#) has recently been grown, as they are cousins of beets and are susceptible to similar pests and diseases.

When to Plant Beets

- Start your first round of beets in early spring, as soon as the soil is workable. Make successive plantings every 2 to 3 weeks until mid-summer.
- Successive plantings are possible through summer as long as daytime temperatures don't exceed 75°F (24°C).

- In soil that's at least 50°F (10°C), germination takes place in 5 to 8 days. In soil colder than that, germination may take 2 to 3 weeks.
 - **Tip:** To speed up germination, or when planting in areas with low moisture and rainfall, soak the seeds in water for 24 hours before planting.
- For a fall harvest, sow beet seeds from mid-summer through early fall, starting about 4 to 6 weeks before your first fall frost.
- Winter crops are a definite possibility in Zone 9 and warmer. Plant beets in early to late fall for a winter harvest.



How to Plant Beets

- We prefer to sow beets directly in the garden so that we don't have to disturb their roots. However, beets—unlike many root crops—do generally tolerate being transplanted while still young. Since they are cold tolerant, beets typically have no

trouble being started outdoors, though.

- Sow seeds ½-inch deep and 1 to 2 inches apart in rows that are about 12 to 18 inches apart. After sowing, cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil.
- Make sure soil remains moist for optimal germination. Soak seeds for 24 hours prior to planting to speed up germination.

Check out this video to learn how to plant beets:

GROWING

- Each wrinkled beet “seed” is actually a cluster of 2 to 4 seeds, so you will need to thin the young plants to 3 to 4 inches apart once the greens get to be about 4 to 5 inches tall. This allows their roots to grow to their proper size.
 - **Tip:** When thinning, don’t pull up the plants, as you may accidentally disturb the roots of the beets you want to keep. Instead, just snip or pinch off the greens (and eat them).
- Mulch and then water regularly with about 1 inch of water per

square foot per week. Beets need to maintain plenty of moisture in order to grow well.

- Weed as needed, but be gentle around young plants; beets have shallow roots that are easily disturbed.
- Consider covering beets with a row cover to prevent pests like leaf miners from attacking the plants' leaves.
- Supplementing with extra fertilizer is usually not necessary. If you do fertilize, go easy on nitrogen; excess will cause an abundance of greens but tiny bulbs beneath the soil.

RECOMMENDED VARIETIES

Beets come in quite a few shapes and a rainbow of colors. Deep red is typical, but yellow and white varieties are also available, as are red-white ringed ones (pictured below)!

- **'Chioggia'**: red skin; when sliced open, reveals red and white concentric rings.
- **'Detroit Dark Red'**: Sturdy, traditional variety. Round, red root.
- **'Formanova'**: Long, cylindrical beets that grow in the same fashion as [carrots](#). Excellent for canning.
- Yellow varieties include **'Bolder'** or **'Touchstone Gold'**
- White varieties include **'Avalanche'** or Dutch heirloom **'Albino'**





HARVESTING

- Days to maturity tend to be between 55 and 70 for most varieties. In other words, plan to harvest beets about 2 months after planting.
- Harvest roots when golf ball-size or larger; very large roots may be tough and woody.
- Loosen the soil around the beet and gently pull it from the earth.
- Harvest the beet greens at almost any time, beginning when thinning seedlings. Take one or two mature leaves per plant, until leaf blades are more than 6 inches tall and become tough. (Roots will not fully form without greens, so leaving some is necessary for proper development.)





Photo credit: Nadezhda Nesterova/Shutterstock

How to Store Beets

- Fresh beets can be stored in the refrigerator for 5 to 7 days.
 - **Tip:** Clipping the tops off beets will keep them fresher for longer. Leave about 1 inch of stem on each beet, and store the greens separately.
- For long-term root cellar storage, make sure you brush off any soil clinging to the roots, then bury them in layers (but not touching) surrounded by dry sand or sawdust.
- Store in a cool, dry place. An unheated closet might do, or put them in a cooler in your basement. Read more about a [new way to store beets](#) in the root cellar.
- Sprouting is a sign of poor storage and leads to decay.
- Beets can be frozen, canned, and [pickled](#), too!

WIT AND WISDOM

- Beets have long been considered an aphrodisiac:
 - Ancient Greeks thought that Aphrodite, their goddess of love, used them to enhance her appeal.
 - Romans believed that beet juice brought on amorous feelings.

PESTS/DISEASES

Beet Pests and Diseases

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
Cercospora leaf spot	Fungus	Cercospora prefers warm/humid conditions and damp nights. Many small brown spots with red-purple halos on leaves that enlarge and turn gray; centers of spots eventually fall out, leaving the halos.	Destroy infected plants; weed; avoid overhead watering; ensure good air circulation; rotate crops.
<u>Cucumber mosaic virus</u>	Virus	May include stunting, mottled green/yellow/white pattern or ringed spots on leaves; distorted leaf growth.	Destroy infected plants; choose resistant varieties and certified virus-free seed; use <u>row covers</u> ; disinfect tools; weed; control <u>aphids</u> (carriers of CMV); use mulch.
<u>Flea beetles</u>	Insect	Numerous tiny holes in leaves—as if they’ve been hit by a shotgun.	Use <u>row covers</u> ; mulch heavily; add native plants to invite beneficial insects.
<u>Leafhoppers</u>	Insect	White shed skins	Knock nymphs off

		on leaf undersides (from nymph molting); stippling (many tiny spots) on leaves; “hopperburn” (leaves yellow/brown, curled, or stunted); reduced yield.	leaf undersides with strong spray of water; use <u>row covers</u> ; monitor adults with yellow sticky traps; weed; destroy crop residue at season end.
<u>Leaf miners</u>	Insect	Meandering blisters in leaves caused by tunneling larvae.	Remove infested leaves; weed; use <u>row covers</u> ; till soil early in season; rotate crops.
Wireworms	Insect	Seeds hollowed; seedlings severed; stunting/wilting; roots eaten; tubers/bulbs bored.	Trap by digging 2- to 4-inch-deep holes every 3 to 10 feet, fill with mix of germinating beans/corn/peas or potato sections as bait, cover with soil or a board, in 1 week uncover and kill collected wireworms; sow seeds in warm soil for quick germination; provide good

			drainage; remove plant debris; rotate crops.
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RECIPES

BEAUTIFUL BEET SOUP

GRANDMA'S PICKLED BEETS

COOKING NOTES

Beets are a nutrient-dense food considered especially beneficial for health. Learn more in “[Beets: Health Benefits!](#)”

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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Clarence (not verified) 9 months 2 weeks ago

1 tablespoon 3% hydrogen peroxide and 1 cup of water for 24 hours. Place a paper towel in a container fold it over pour mixture over paper towel until damp unfold the towel and spread seeds. fold towel again and add enough solution to keep damp over night.

REPLY

Ben (not verified) 12 months ago

So where can you grow them anywhere?

REPLY

REPLY

Janet Johnson (not verified) 1 year 2 months ago

In the summer I am suddenly bombarded with Japanese Beetles on my beautiful grape vines what will get rid of them and not harm my pets?

REPLY

Kathy Basso (not verified) 2 months 2 weeks ago

Japanese beetles are mature grubs that are in your soil. Use milky spore on your grass and soil (it's organic). Spring is a great time to apply. It will kill the grubs and eliminate the Japanese beetles.

There are some milky spore brands that only require one application

REPLY

Larry schuth (not verified) 3 months 3 weeks ago

Wee had a pet duck. He loved them. We

hold him and aim him at the beetles and they were gone. He would eat 150 or more a day. In a few days they were hard to find.

REPLY

Roger Hansen (not verified) 1 year 2 months ago

If you have time & not too many grape plants, you can hold a cottage cheese container that contains water & a drop of dish soap (about half full) under the beetles. Touch them & they will usually roll off the leaves & into the water. If you have too many for that, Raid flying insect spray works well on beetle clusters.

Seven or Eight spray works well also. I always spray some Raid into my soapy water when I start just to make sure they don't escape. After you're done catching them, spray them again & after a few minutes they make great fertilizer in your flowerbed or compost bin.

REPLY

Carol (not verified) 1 year 4 months ago

I have beautiful beets. Large leaves and good size beets. I steamed a few today and they are very bland and not sweet at all. Is there anything I can do to make them sweet. I live in zone 10

REPLY

The Editors 1 year 4 months ago

It would appear that your soil has a suitable pH, if the beets are healthy but it's still good to do a soil test. Another effect could be water stress. If the beets did not get sufficient water when growing the taste could be affected.

REPLY

Allyssa (not verified) 1 year 9 months ago

Cut off tops and roots. Boil smaller beets whole.

Bigger ones you may need to cut in halves or quarters. Boil until done (tender), cool, slide skin off, slice.

Put sliced beets in an air-tight container with olive

oil, lemon juice, garlic, salt and pepper to taste.

Serve cold. Great with falafel or any salad!:) Enjoy!

REPLY

Hamish Montgomerie (not verified) 1 year 11 months ago

I find the Old Farmers' Almanac invaluable. The only problem is deciding which state is closest to England (where I live) in climate. Washington (Seattle) seems to be closest but the e.g. beetroot (outdoors) and pepper sowing times (indoors) and some other veg dates are a bit early. Could you point me at a particular area that may be closer? Thanks, yours, Hamish M.

REPLY

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