

## **THE SUPER “SUPER FOOD” - BEETS!**

June 2018



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When talking to almost anyone about food, comfort foods like pasta, chocolate and ice cream generally elicit ooohs, aaahs and smiles. Bring up the topic of beets and the mood quickly turns serious dividing participants into two camps - those who love them and those who want nothing to do with them. I am in the “love them” camp and enjoy using them in unexpected ways which oftentimes surprises those who firmly state they dislike them.

Part of the same food family as Swiss chard, quinoa and spinach, beet origins can be traced back many centuries to North Africa, Asia and Europe. Initially, people only ate the green leaves and not the roots. Once it was

discovered that the beet root could be a concentrated source of sugar, their use and value increased.

Beets are a somewhat unique, power-packed superfood. Not only are they anti-inflammatory and contain anti-oxidants, but also are helpful to the body’s detoxification process. In addition, beets contain many essential vitamins and minerals such as folate and other B vitamins, iron, manganese, copper, magnesium, potassium, and vitamin C. According to numerous studies, eating beets regularly can lower the risk of heart disease, improve blood pressure, digestive health, liver function, stamina, eye health and brain power.

Dark red or purple beets are what come to mind for most people, yet many varieties are available - yellow, orange, white, even red and white striped. Some varieties look similar to a carrot in shape and color, and sugar beets actually resemble a turnip. As for flavor profile, dark red beets are more strongly flavored and earthy, while lighter colored beets taste more mild and sweet.

The juice from beets has been used as a very effective color dye for centuries. But, having dark red stained hands is not always welcome! A tip for removing beet juice from skin is to make a paste of salt and lemon juice, then rub the paste on the stained areas. Wash thoroughly with soap and water, and pat hands dry.

### **HOW TO BUY**

Fresh beets are easily found in grocery stores year-round, and at farmers markets from June through October depending on your location.

When purchasing fresh beets, look for roots that have good color and smooth or unblemished skins, are firm to the touch and have leaves that are not wilting. Small to medium-sized beets

tend to be sweeter and more tender. Larger beets (over 2 ½ inches in diameter) can be older, tough and woody.

Prepared beets with no additives can be found in the refrigerated produce section of many grocery stores. Two popular brands include -

- Love Beets - <https://www.lovebeets.com/>
- Melissa's Produce - <https://www.melissas.com/Peeled-Baby-Red-Beets-p/25.htm>

Canned beets can be found in the canned vegetable section of grocery stores. Look for those without additives.

### **STORAGE TIPS**

- Beets will keep longer if they are not washed until ready to use.
- When storing, trim the leaves leaving about 2 inches of stem attached to the beet. Do not trim the taproot on the bottom of the beet until ready to use.
- Store beets in an airtight container or tightly sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator. They will last from one to three weeks uncooked, and approximately one week in the refrigerator after cooking.
- As an alternative, fresh beets can be stored in a dry, cool place (such as a basement or cellar) wrapped in a paper bag, cloth or paper towel.
- Beet greens can be stored in a separate plastic bag or wrapped in a paper towel in the refrigerator for several days. Wash thoroughly before using.
- Cooked beets can be frozen in a tightly sealed container or plastic bag for up to 8 months.

### **HOW TO USE**

Beets are an extremely versatile food that can be used root to stem - from breakfast to dessert! Serve the roots raw (shaved or shredded), steamed, boiled, roasted, grilled, baked or juiced. They pair well with cheeses, apples, nuts, dill, citrus, fennel, mustard-based sauces, dips and even chocolate (think cake!).

Beet greens are wonderful when sautéed and serve as a side dish, used in a pesto, soup or stew, stir-fry, grain bowl, or added to a smoothie. Try this recipe for [Sauteed Beet Greens with Garlic and Olive Oil](#) from Martha Rose Shulman, posted in The New York Times.

**RECIPE:** To change up your salsa routine, try this recipe for [Roasted Golden Beet Salsa!](#) It's delightful served as an appetizer with chips or crackers, or as an accompaniment to whole grains, fish, chicken or pork. Enjoy!



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