

Home Gardening Series

Beets

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Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained
Fertility – medium
pH – 6.0 to 7.0
Temperature – cool-warm
Moisture – moist

Culture

Planting – direct seed, spring or fall
Spacing – 1-2 x 18 inches, thin
Hardiness – cool season hardy
Fertilizer – heavy feeder, requires boron

Beets – *Beta vulgaris*

Beets are derived from the wild plants of the seacoasts of the Mediterranean regions and adjacent Europe. Also known as garden beets or red beets, beets are a popular garden vegetable throughout Arkansas. Beet tops are a good source of vitamin A, and the roots are a good source of vitamin C. The tops are cooked or served fresh as greens, while the root may be pickled for salads or cooked whole, sliced or diced. Beet juice is a basic ingredient of Russian borscht (a Russian vegetable soup). Garden beet is closely related to Swiss chard, sugar beets and mangels. Mangels (also known as stock beets) are considered too coarse for human consumption but are grown for stock feed.



Cultural Practices

Planting Time

Beets are frost-hardy and can be planted in the garden 30 days before the frost-free date for your area. Although beets grow well during warm weather, establishing the seedlings under cool, moist conditions is easier. To get a continuous supply of fresh, tender, young beets, plant at three- to four-week intervals into July. Irrigation assures germination and establishment of the later plantings.

Spacing and Depth of Planting

The beet “seed” is a cluster of seeds in a dried fruit. Several seedlings grow from each seed. Plant seed approximately 1/2 inch deep and 1 to 2 inches apart. Allow 12 to 18 inches between rows. Poor stands are often the result of planting too deep or the crusting of heavy soil after a rain. The seedlings may emerge over a long period, making a stand of different sizes and ages of seedlings. Hand thinning is usually necessary. Thin the seedlings to 2 to 3 inches apart. If thinning is delayed until the plants are 3 inches high, those removed may be cooked as greens similar to spinach. Some cooks leave the small roots (usually about the size of a marble) attached to the greens.

Care

Frequent, shallow cultivation is important because beets compete poorly with weeds. Hand weeding and early, frequent and shallow cultivation are the most effective methods of

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Cultivars

Crop	Variety	Days to Maturity	Seed/ 100 Ft of Row	Disease Resistance or Tolerance	Sources (see "Sources" paragraph below)	Remarks
Beets	Ruby Queen	54	2 oz	DM (R)	6, 12, 27, 32, 35, 36	Round beet, deep red color, good quality and yield.
	Detroit Dark Red	68	2 oz		1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 27, 31, 32, 35, 36	Deep red, good yield and quality.
	Red Ace	53	2 oz	CLS, PM, DM, DR, RZ (T)	2, 9, 27, 32	Globe shaped, smooth red interior. 14-inch tops green with red tinge. Sweet honey flavor. Bolting tolerant.
	Bull's Blood	58	2 oz		1, 5, 8, 16	Dual-purpose beet. Leaves great for salad; root good at baby and full size. Dark red foliage, red striped root.
	Golden Beet	50	2 oz		16, 27, 30	Dual-purpose beet. Golden beet that doesn't bleed. Tops taste like spinach.

Abbreviations: **CLS**: Cercospora Leaf Spot; **DM**: Downy Mildew; **DR**: Dry Rot; **N**: Nematode; **PM**: Powdery Mildew; **RZ**: Rhizoctonia
(R): Resistant; **(T)**: Tolerant

controlling weeds in the row because beets are extremely shallow rooted. Deep cultivation after the weeds are large damages the beet roots. Like most root crops, beets need a fertile soil (especially high in potassium) for vigorous growth. Keep your beet plants well supplied with moisture.

Sources

For a list of sources referred to by number, request FSA6106, *Seed Sources: Vegetable and Herb*, for current address, telephone and web site.

Harvesting

Beets can be harvested whenever they reach the desired size. Beet greens are nutritious; they add flavor and color to salads. The older leaves can be harvested when they are 2 to 3 inches long. More mature leaves can be harvested and cooked as greens. The beet roots need about 60 days to reach 1 1/2 inches in diameter. This size is often used for cooking, pickling or canning as whole beets. Beets enlarge rapidly to 3 inches with adequate moisture and space. They may be stored in a polyethylene bag in a refrigerator for several weeks or in a root cellar if dug before the ground freezes in the fall. Cut the tops off the beets 1 inch above the root. Beets store best at 32 degrees F and 95 percent humidity.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What causes the beets in my garden to develop tops but not roots?

- A. The most frequent cause for beet plants failing to develop roots is overcrowding due to improper thinning.

Q. What causes my beets to have internal black spots and many bottom leaves to die?

- A. Beets are a relatively high feeder of the element boron. Applying one level tablespoon of household borax dissolved in a 12-quart pail of water along 100 feet of row alleviates this condition. If the soil is acidic, lime it according to a soil test. Too much boron can be toxic to subsequent crops.

Q. Is it practical to grow sugar beets to make sugar at home?

- A. No. Special equipment for juice extraction and great amounts of energy for evaporation are required to make beet sugar.

Q. What causes beet roots to fail to enlarge and often become woody?

- A. High temperatures, low moisture and slow growth caused by low fertility produce low-quality beet roots. To have enlarged and high-quality beet roots, they must mature under ideal temperatures, moderate fertility levels and have adequate moisture.

Q. I am canning beets and have some roots with poor color. What caused this?

- A. Cooler temperatures (50 to 60 degrees F) produce darker colored beets than warmer temperatures (70 degrees F and warmer). Generally, fall- and winter-grown beets are darker than those grown in spring. Smaller roots usually have better color than larger roots.

Q. Are beet tops good to eat?

A. Yes. Beet tops are prepared like other types of greens, such as collards or turnips, and have a distinctive flavor. The young leaves are used in salad mixes.

Q. Every time I plant beet seeds, more than one plant comes up from each seed. Is this normal or am I doing something wrong?

A. Table beet seeds are really clusters of single-seeded fruits grown together into a seedball or multiple fruit. It is common for several seedlings to come up from each seed planted. After your plants start coming up, they should be thinned to 1 inch between plants to allow for normal root development.

Q. My beet leaves are perforated by small holes. These holes at first are purple and then fall out giving the leaves a shothole effect.

A. This condition is caused by *Cercospora*, an airborne fungus which becomes a problem under wet, moist conditions. It can be controlled with maneb sprays; however, this fungus does not cause any serious loss in beet size or development.