

A RAINBOW OF BEETS AND HOW TO GROW THEM



Though we picture beets as round and crimson in color (or “red as a beet”), varieties run the spectrum from white to yellow and orange to burgundy. They range from spherical to cylindrical when it comes to shape, and some reveal white rings once sliced.

How to Grow Beets

As a half-hardy vegetable, beets are fairly tolerant of frost, surviving temperatures as low as 30 degrees (F). Grow beets in full sun or part shade, in the ground, raised beds or even in pots. More sun will ensure the very best roots, but if you’re growing beets primarily for their leaves, part shade does the trick.

Beets are most successful in cooler climates, where their seeds can be sown in the garden in early spring, up to 30 days before the typical last frost. The soil should be at least 45 degrees (F) at sowing time.

Beets are typically not bothered by pests and diseases. The key is to grow beets in fertile soil and keep the moisture consistent, especially as seedlings are developing. Keep the garden free of weeds, removing these regularly and while they’re small, to avoid disturbing the beet roots. Beets prefer even conditions.

How to Grow Beets from Seed

Sow beet seeds half an inch deep and one to two inches apart in well-drained soil that’s loose, free of stones and rich in organic matter. Space rows roughly 12 to 18 inches apart. Keep the soil constantly and consistently moist; beets are likely to develop scab and other problems in soil that dries out. (Raised brown spots on harvested beets indicate scab.) Spreading a thin layer of mulch over the soil will help conserve moisture.

Beets lends themselves well to succession planting, which ensures a consistent supply of small, tender, tasty beets and leaves. To achieve this, sow seeds every two or three weeks from the first planting until midsummer.

Harvesting and Storing Beets

Typically beet roots are harvested 50 to 70 days after planting, when they measure 1 to 2 inches in diameter. You'll notice their shoulders cresting the soil line. Check the seed packet for more specific timing and size for the variety you're growing. But in general, larger roots tend to be tougher and woody, and taller leaves can become too bitter in flavor, so don't delay picking too long.

VARIETIES:

'Detroit Dark Red': An heirloom variety that's a favorite for canning and pickling or eating fresh. Burgundy in color. 59 days to harvest.

'Choiggia': The classic bull's-eye beet with red and white rings that show when it's sliced. 54 days to harvest.

'Avalanche': An all-white variety, this beet received an All-America Selections award in 2015. Judges noted it has no earthy flavor, just sweetness. 50 days to harvest.

'Cylindra': This long, narrow, dark red beet is great for cutting into uniform slices. 60 days to harvest.

'Touchstone Gold': These small beets show deep orange skin and a bright yellow interior. It retains its color when cooked. 55 days to harvest.

'Fresh Pak': This variety is grown only for its leaves; it does not produce usable roots. The foliage is deep green with dark red veins, and it grows uniform and lush. 28 days to harvest baby leaves; 40 days for full-size leaves.