



# Botanical INTERESTS®

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## Beet: Sow and Grow Guide



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Join the beet renaissance! As the popularity of growing beets is increasing, all root vegetables are experiencing a culinary renaissance. Beets come in a variety of colors, shapes, and textures, but all are highly nutritious, including significant amounts of fiber, potassium, folic acid, and vitamin C. Betalains are powerful antioxidants that give red beets their red hue and unique flavor. Gold beets are rich in b-xanthin pigment. Beets are grown in all areas of the country, and plants take up very little garden space.

### Historical Information

Beets were originally grown and enjoyed only for the greens. The root did not appear in recipes until 14th century England. Although there were only a few varieties known in the 17th and 18th centuries, women were using red beet juice as a cheek and lip stain.

### General Sowing

**When to Sow Outside:** RECOMMENDED. 2 to 4 weeks before average last frost, when soil temperature is at least 45°F, ideally 60°-85°F, for early summer crop. 6 to 8 weeks before first fall frost for late summer/fall crop. Growing during hot temperature periods should be avoided. Mild Climates: Sow fall through winter.

**When to Start Inside:** Not recommended. Root crops do not transplant well.



*Fresh beets*

### *Special Sowing Instructions*

To hasten germination, soak seeds for 8 to 24 hours before sowing. Do not allow a crust to build up on soil surface; seedlings struggle to come up through crust. Seeds can germinate and grow with soil temperatures as low as 40°F, but may take a month or longer to germinate. Beet seeds are actually dry fruit containing many seeds that often germinate in clusters, so proper thinning is very important.

### *How many do I plant?*

How much do you love beets? Ten feet of beets can yield about 30 beets that should be consumed within about a month. Beets can be sown in succession, every 2-3 weeks, so 5'-10' every succession for 2 people is probably adequate for eating fresh, but if you are canning or juicing, you may want to grow more.

## **Outdoor Sowing**

### *Soil preparation and Spacing*

Beets will grow in a wide range of soils, but perform best in well-drained, sandy loam, rich in organic matter. Your garden bed should be cultivated at least 8" deep before sowing. Sow 1 seed every 4" in rows 1' apart. If you want to grow beets for only the baby greens, they can be sown more densely, with seeds just 1" apart.

### *Growing Temperature*

Beets are frost-tolerant and grow best in the cool temperatures of spring and fall, or winter in mild climates.

### *Water*

Beets demand a constant supply of moisture. Without it, even for a short period, root development may be adversely affected.

### *Fertilization*

Beets require a lot of potassium, which is usually present and available in western soils, but not in eastern soils. Wood ash is a good source of potassium. If your soil lacks potassium amend prior to sowing, if possible.

### *Weeding*

Cultivate shallowly to avoid root disturbance.

## Thinning

Since one beet seed can create several seedlings, be sure to thin to 1 seedling every 4" by the time seedlings are 2" tall.

## Special Care

Mulch soil surface after plants are 2" high to help retain soil moisture. Rotate beets (and others in the Amaranthaceae Family) location so they are not grown in the same area more than once every 3 years.

## Harvesting

### Roots

For early spring sowings, harvest beets before summer heat. For late summer sowings, harvest before first heavy frost. For winter sowings in mild climates, harvest in early spring. Harvest when roots are anywhere from 1"-3" or 4" in diameter depending on variety (consult seed packet). Do not let them get too big; the smaller they are, the more tender. Beet greens are even more nutritious than the roots.

### Leaves

Greens are most tender when small, so harvest starting when they are 2" tall. You can take as much as one third of a beet plant's outer leaves without harming the root crop.



Pickled beets recipe

## Storage

Remove tops and store washed roots in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Tops can be stored in a separate bag, in the refrigerator for up to a wee



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