

BEETS

Beetroot, Garden Beet

Beta vulgaris subsp. vulgaris

Chenopodiaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Beets are a hardy, cool-season vegetable with edible leaves and a fleshy, deep red tap root.

Uses

Table beets are raised for human consumption. One relative, the sugarbeet has a higher percentage of sugar in its root and is processed for granulated sugar. Leftover beet pulp is fed to cattle.

Common Names

- Spanish
 - Remolacha

Cultivation

Beet seeds are planted early in the growing season when soil temperature is 18-20°C (64-68°F) at 1.5-2.5 cm (½- 1 inch) deep. The distance between seeds depends upon which part of the plant is preferred for eating. Beets measuring 4-5 cm (1.5 in) diameter are a marketable size.

- Elevation: At 600 m (1968 ft) and higher, root development occurs.
- Rainfall: With moderate rainfall of 300 mm (12 in) beets do not require irrigation because of their deep tap root but they do not tolerate water-logged soil.
- Soil types: Beets thrive in rich, well-drained, sandy-loam in full sun. They tolerate some salinity and prefer a pH range of 6-8.
- Temperature range: 16-20° C (61-68° F), Lower temperatures increase leaf thickness. Beets tolerate warmer temperatures than spinach, not over 25° C (77° F) but will bolt if temperature is below 10° C (50° F) for two weeks.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Within 70 days from planting, beets may be dug and stored for 4-6 months at temperatures of 0 - 4.4°C (32- 40° F) and 90-95% humidity. The greens may be harvested up to seed set when they become bitter. As biennials, beets do not set seed until a second growing season. If left in the ground without freezing, beets will send up a flower stalk the following growing season. When the seeds turn light brown, the stalks may be cut, placed in an open-weave bag and dried further. Walking on the bag will separate the seeds from the stalks. Seed can also be saved from beets that have been dug from the ground, held for the winter season under moist conditions at just above freezing and planted the following season. Seeds stored in a cool, dry, dark location can be viable for 4-6 years.

Pests and Diseases

Root rot fungi increase in wet, cool soil. Planting beets on ridges, spacing seeds farther apart for good air circulation and rotating beet crops with grain crops may discourage growth of the fungus.

Cooking and Nutrition

The greens are the most nutritious part of the beet plant. When raw or lightly steamed, they retain very high levels of Vit. A, Vit. C, iron, calcium and potassium. The root may be eaten raw, cooked, pickled or canned. Beets should be cooked without peeling, with 1 inch of the stem and all of the taproot left on to retain the deep red color, potassium and Vit. A