



Beets

There's no doubt that beets are beautiful. Their range of colors match those of a sunset and yet many people are still not tempted to sample these beauties. In general, the cause of this prejudice seems to be a collective childhood memory of the dreaded canned beet. However, consumers need to drop this prejudice when approaching farm fresh beets because they are so much better than canned, they may as well be considered an all together different vegetable.

Beets are an easy to grow, cool weather crop. Before the days of year round produce availability, beets were considered such a good storage crop that they were generally put up for winter instead of eaten fresh during the summer when more perishable items were in abundance. (Thus our problem with the ubiquitous canned beet!)

With the advent of a new generation of chefs and eaters who were *not* raised on the odious canned

version, and the popularity of farmer's markets, beets are experiencing a renaissance, and with good reason. With their mild, sweet earthy flavor, beets are easily combined with many flavors in the kitchen. Vinegar, cheeses, nuts, and citrus all pair well with beets, helping to tame their sweetness while highlighting their earthy quality.

As a bonus, beet greens can be eaten as well. They are similar to swiss chard and in fact, the first beets were more like chard in that they did not have the swollen root that we consider a beet today. The "improved" beet, with a turnip like root, was called a Roman Beet, indicating its Italian origin.



This recipe comes from More Home Cooking by Laurie Colwin. Laurie is my favorite kitchen guru and if you like to cook or even just to read about cooking, this book belongs in your collection.

BEETS WITH ANGEL HAIR PASTA

8 oz. angel hair pasta
4 medium beets, any color
2 Tbsp. olive oil
1 clove garlic
½ small onion, minced
salt and pepper to taste
½ c. broth or water
½ tsp. chopped rosemary
crushed red pepper flakes
parmesan cheese

Dice the beets up fine. Saute in oil with salt and pepper until just tender. Add the garlic and onion. Cook for one minute. Add broth or water. Stir in rosemary and pepper flakes. Spoon over cooked pasta and serve with lots of freshly grated parmesan cheese.

I didn't like beets until I was lucky enough to eat at Chez Panisse and was served frisee salad with tiny multicolored beet slices arranged around the tips of the endive. It looked like a lollipop tree and tasted even better. I have been smitten ever since.

RAINBOW BEETS WITH ORANGE VINAIGRETTE

1 bunch mixed beets, greens removed (chioggia, gold and white)
2 tsp. orange zest
½ c. orange juice
4 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
2 cloves garlic
2 Tbsp. parsley
1 tsp. salt
½ c. olive oil

Carefully scrub the beets. Put in a baking pan with a little bit of oil, salt and pepper. Cover the bottom of the pan with about ½ in. of water. Cover the pan with tinfoil and roast at 375 degrees, until a beet can easily be pierced with a fork. When beets are cool, trim the ends and rub with a paper towel to remove their skin. Cut into sections. Puree the dressing ingredients in a blender. Pour over beets and stir well to combine.

*Recipes and information provided by Harmony Valley Farm; its farmers and staff.
For more information go to www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com*

A Midwestern Palette - Eating With the Seasons

Though many fresh foods are available year round, our regional agricultural community, and the urban communities surrounded by them, benefit when we choose to eat seasonally, from local producers. Knowing the seasonality of our favorite produce allows us to make informed choices.



Beets are available year round, either fresh from the field or from cold storage. Fresh beets are generally sold with the greens attached, an indication of being recently harvested. However, don't shy away from bulk beets.

They are often priced more reasonably and have just as much flavor as fresh beets. One caveat, beet skin slips most easily off of the freshest beets.

Preparation and Storage Tips

Beets are excellent keepers. If you buy them with the greens on and don't intend to eat them right away, separate the greens about an inch above the top of the beet (to prevent the color from bleeding) and store the greens and the roots separately, in plastic bags in the refrigerator. The greens should remain fresh for about a week, the roots should last a month or more.

The most common way to prepare beets is to boil them but I prefer to roast beets. It retains their nutrients as well as concentrating their flavor, instead of washing it away. I use a 9 by 13 pan and put the beets in with a little oil, salt and pepper and about ½ inch of water. Cover the pan with tin foil and roast at 375 degrees for about 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the size of the beet. When they are ready, you should be able to stick a fork through the largest beet with no resistance. Wait until cool and

I don't have any kids so maybe I'm wrong but it seems like you could get them to eat this just because of it's shocking pink color. If not, that's okay too because the adults will want to eat it all! This is an Indian dish but I think it would go well with a picnic.

BEETS WITH MINT AND YOGURT

2 medium beets
2 c. plain yogurt
salt and pepper to taste
pinch cayenne (optional)
2 ½ Tbsp. fresh mint, chopped
1 Tbsp. olive oil
1 large garlic clove, sliced

Roast beets (method described in prep tips.). Grate the roasted, peeled beets into a bowl. Added the yogurt, salt and pepper, cayenne and mint. Stir gently until combined. In the meantime, fry garlic in oil over medium heat until light brown. Add oil and garlic to beet mixture and stir to combine. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Storage Tips Continued

peel the skins off with a paper towel. For keeping white, gold or chiongia beets from intermingling colors, wrap each beet in tinfoil to roast or use separate pans (loaf pans are good for this). If you cook the beets ahead, store them in separate bowls or they will turn colors where they were resting against one another. If you are in a hurry or don't want to heat up your kitchen in the dead of summer, the microwave works well too. One pound of beets with ¼ c. of water will take approximately 10 minutes in the microwave.