

Sweet Beets

Delicate, gorgeous and easy to prepare, beets are filled with disease-fighting nutrients.

By KAREN OLSON

WITH THEIR KNOBBY, sometimes hairy exteriors, whole, raw beets can intimidate those who have not cooked them. But while they might look gnarly on the outside, the insides of beets reveal vibrant, jewel-like colors that range from deep red to golden yellow — even candy-cane stripes. When cooked properly, beets (also called beetroot) have a sweet, buttery, earthy flavor and a delicate texture. Beet greens are luscious, too, whether sautéed or braised. A relative of nutrient-rich quinoa, as well as of spinach and Swiss chard, beets offer phytonutrients that help your body detoxify, eliminate free radicals and tame inflammation. So go out and track down a bunch of these gems — and enjoy.





Raw: Slice them thinly for recipes like the carpaccio on page 48, or grate for salads.



Juiced: For a zesty beetroot juice, combine beets, a whole lemon, a couple of apples, a chunk of gingerroot and a stalk of celery. (Beet greens are great in juices and smoothies, as well.)



Steamed or boiled: Wash beets and cook in a steamer, or simmer in water, covered, until tender. When the beets are cool, rub off the skin with a paper towel. Cut as desired (nice sliced on salads and pizzas).



Roasted: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Wash beets, place in a roasting pan with a little water, and cover with aluminum foil. Roast for 20 to 45 minutes, depending on size, until tender.



Raw or sautéed beet greens: If you're lucky enough to get a bunch of beets with the green tops still attached, you can use them raw in salads, cook them as you would any leafy green or add them to smoothies. To sauté, first separate the leafy part from the tough stem. Cook the stems first (with a little olive oil, an acid like vinegar or citrus juice, and salt and pepper) until tender. Add the leafy greens at the last minute and cook until wilted.

Quick & Easy

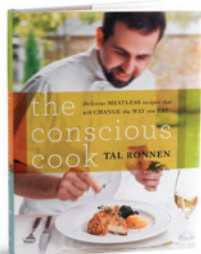
Six simple ways to prepare
(and enjoy!) beets.



Pickled: For quick pickled beets, add sliced steamed or roasted beets to a mixture of rice-wine vinegar, honey, chopped gingerroot, hot peppers and a little salt. The beets taste best after marinating for a couple of days. Store in the refrigerator and consume within a month. ➔

Beet It!

TAL RONNEN has been cooking beets for so long, he thinks he's seen everything that can be done with them. His fondest memory is the beet soup he had as a kid. "My grandfather was Russian, so we grew up eating borscht. I love it," says Ronnen, an L.A.-based vegan chef and author of the much-heralded cookbook *The Conscious Cook* (William Morrow, 2009). Ronnen develops recipes for Lyfe Kitchen, a California-based restaurant franchise serving delectable, nutritious food that's been sustainably sourced. He's also a consultant chef at the Wynn, a resort and casino in Las Vegas, where he's developed 20 vegan menus that are available alongside the regular menus at any of the 20 Wynn restaurants.



How do you like to eat beets?

I don't have one favorite way. You can roast beets or boil them.

You can slice them thin for a carpaccio or you can steam them. There are so many cool ways to work with beets.

Are some beets earthier than others?

Large red beets always taste earthier to me. My favorite beets to use for cooking are golden and red, for contrast.

What's the most common mistake people make when cooking beets?

Overcooking them. Beets should still have a bit of bite to them.

Any tips for preparing and cooking beets?

Experiment. I think that's

the best way to get to know any produce or vegetable and learn techniques for cooking them.

Should beets be peeled before cooking?

You can go either way. If you want to get more flavor into the beets during the cooking process, peel them first. But most people keep the skin on, which prevents the beets from losing their color and might help stem nutrient loss.

Please share some ideas for simple beet dishes.

Cook more beets than you need and then keep a few of them in the refrigerator so you can dice or slice them into a salad. They add great color and texture. Pickled beets — with a light, sweet pickling — are also nice for salads.

What flavors pair well with beets?

Caraway seeds. Horseradish. Dijon. Citrus is great with

beets, of course — oranges, orange juice, orange zest. Shallots go great with beets, as does tarragon. Then there's vinegar, especially balsamic.

For people who think they don't like beets, what is a good preparation?

Try them shaved thinly in a salad. Another good option — and it's kid-friendly as well — is fried beet chips.

Any other general beet tips?

Beets are soft, so having other elements on the plate with a firmer, crunchier texture, such as pistachios or walnuts — things that can contrast not just the flavor but also the texture — is really important.

I know you grew up eating your grandfather's borscht. Any recent beet stories to share?

White chef coats and beets don't mix well!

Colorful Beets

Red Beets

With their deep wine color, red beets are the most common beets found in American markets.



Chioggia

Featuring red-and-white candy-cane rings, Chioggia beets have a slightly sweeter taste than red beets.



Albina Verduna (Snow White)

The pale-white flesh of these beets blends well with other foods.



Golden Beets

Yellow-gold beets tend to be slightly sweeter than red, and their color doesn't bleed when cooking.



NUTRITIONAL KNOW-HOW

■ Beets are rich in phytonutrients like betalains, which offer anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and detoxification support. Bruising damages betalains, as does overcooking. To prevent loss of betalains, steam sliced beets for less than 15 minutes or roast them whole for no longer than an hour.

■ Betacyanin, a betalain that gives red beets their rich red-violet color, helps guard against colon and stomach cancers.

■ Lutein and zeaxanthin, carotenoid phytonutrients that support eye health, are plentiful in beet greens. More lutein is found in

the roots (the beet bulb is also called the root) of yellow beets than of other varieties.

■ The antioxidants found in beet fiber help to significantly reduce cholesterol, combat colon cancer and support cardiovascular health.

■ Beets are rich in the B vitamin folate (also called folic acid or folacin, an important nutrient during pregnancy for normal tissue growth), vitamin C, and dietary minerals like manganese, potassium and iron.

Beet and Carrot Soup

This vibrant soup is great hot or chilled. For a tarter flavor, substitute lemon juice and zest in place of the orange juice and zest.

Makes six servings

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds beets, peeled and diced
- 3 medium carrots, diced
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 quart beef, chicken or vegetable stock
- 2 oranges, zested and juiced
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 4 tbs. plain Greek yogurt
- 4 tsp. walnut oil or toasted hazelnut oil
- Chopped fresh dill or other herb for garnish, if desired

Heat the olive oil in a large soup pot over medium heat, add the vegetables and salt, and sweat the vegetables until almost cooked through. (“Sweating” the vegetables simply means to sauté gently in a pan without browning.) Add the stock and simmer until vegetables are completely cooked. Add half of the orange zest and all the juice, as well as the pepper. Purée in a blender until smooth. Adjust seasonings to taste. Serve with a dollop of yogurt, a drizzle of walnut oil and reserved orange zest. Garnish with dill and serve immediately, or chill in the refrigerator.



Roasted-Beet Pizza

Sliced beets resemble pepperoni on a traditional pizza and offer an earthy sweetness that pairs perfectly with chèvre or other tart cheeses. If you happen to have young beet greens, chop them up and add them to the top of this pizza after it is cooked.

Makes four servings

- 4 six-inch gluten-free or whole-grain crusts
- ½ cup basil pesto
- 6 oz. fresh mozzarella, sliced
- 4 cups roasted beets, peeled and sliced (about 5 to 6 medium beets)
- 2 cups sliced asparagus
- 4 oz. chèvre
- Chopped kalamata olives, minced preserved lemon, chopped walnuts, sun-dried tomatoes or caramelized onions, if desired

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. If you have a pizza stone, preheat it on the middle rack of the oven. Spread each crust with 2 tablespoons basil pesto and top each equally with the mozzarella, beets, asparagus and chèvre. Bake until cheese is lightly browned, about five to seven minutes. Top with olives and lemons, walnuts, sun-dried tomatoes or caramelized onions, as desired. Cut into wedges and serve with a salad. ➔



KITCHEN TRICKS

- Beet juice will stain clothing, towels and skin, so you might want to wear gloves when handling beets. If your hands get stained, rub them with lemon juice.
- It's generally best to peel beets after cooking because their nutrients and color can drain away without the protective skin.
- Beet greens should be cooked separately. Young, small and tender beet leaves are best for eating raw or in a quick sauté, while larger leaves are best braised.

SHOPPING AND STORAGE TIPS

- Select beets of similar size so they will cook evenly. Medium-size beets (2½ inches in diameter) are most often used for cooking. Small, young beets (about 1½ inches in diameter) are very tender and cook quickly; they are also great raw. Larger beets tend to be tough.
- If you buy beets with the greens still attached, remove the greens as soon as you get home to prevent moisture from being drained out of the root bulb. Leave 2 inches of the stem to prevent loss of nutrients and color while cooking. Store the greens in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to four days.
- Unwashed beets can be stored in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed plastic bag for two to four weeks.
- Raw beets do not freeze well and will become watery and soft when thawed. Cooked beets, however, freeze well and retain their flavor and texture.

All recipes were created by **Betsy Nelson** (a.k.a. "That Food Girl"), a Minneapolis-based food stylist and recipe developer.



WEB EXTRA!

For our Sautéed Beet Greens With Smoked Sausage recipe, see ELmag.com/beets.



Beet Carpaccio

Carpaccio is traditionally made with thinly sliced raw beef. This version, made with sliced raw beets, is a great way to showcase a variety of heirloom beet varieties, such as striped Chioggia, golden and red.

Makes six servings

- 6 cups thinly sliced beets (about 4 to 5 medium beets)
- 2 tbs. red-wine vinegar
- Flake sea salt to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 4 tbs. capers
- 2 tbs. finely minced red onion
- 4 tsp. toasted hazelnut oil or other flavorful, high-quality oil
- ½ cup micro greens or baby field greens

Toss the beets with vinegar. Marinate at room temperature for five minutes and then arrange the beet slices artfully on a platter. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, capers and red onion, and drizzle with hazelnut oil. Top with a small mound of micro greens in the center. ➤

Karen Olson is a Minneapolis-based writer and a frequent contributor to *Experience Life*.

NOTE: Readers sometimes ask us why we don't publish calorie, carb and fat counts with our recipes. We believe that if you're eating primarily whole, healthy foods (an array of sustainably raised vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, meats, fish, eggs, whole-kernel grains, and healthy fats and oils), you really don't need to stress about the numbers (which are often inaccurate or misleading anyway). We prefer to focus more on food quality and trust our bodies to tell us what we need. — Eds.