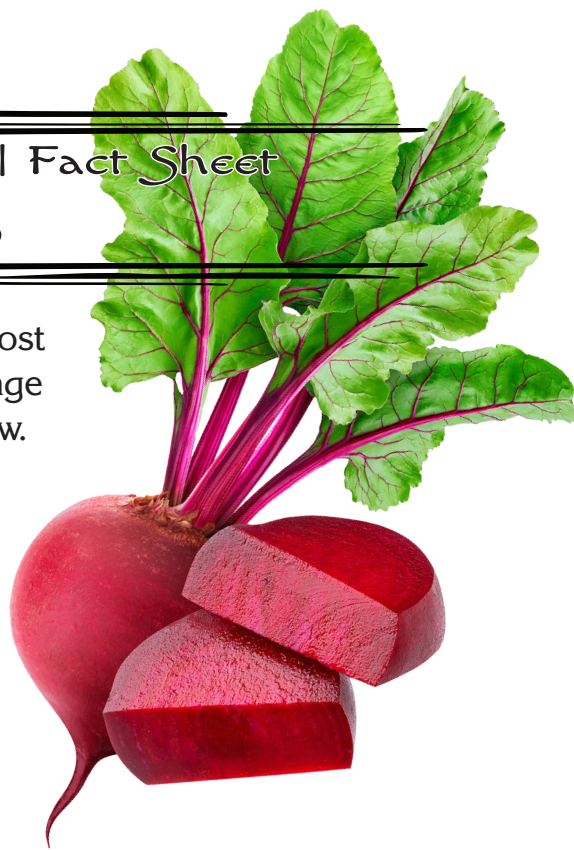




Harvest of the Month | Fact Sheet

Beets

Beets are globe-shaped root vegetables that most commonly are a deep red–purple but can range in color from shades of red to white and yellow. The deep red color comes from a natural plant pigment that has disease–fighting properties. When cut transversely, the roots show light and dark rings. The beet leaves, or beet tops, are also edible.



Did you know?

- Beet juice is widely used as a natural dye to give pink or red coloring to processed foods.
- The pigments found in beets can cause urine to turn red, but this effect is temporary and harmless.
- People originally ate beet greens but not the roots. They occasionally used the roots medicinally.

Selection

Beets should be round and relatively firm with smooth skins free from cuts and bruises. An optimal size is 2–3 inches in diameter. Beets larger than that are often fibrous and woody. If possible, choose beets with the greens still attached to ensure the freshest product. The beet greens should be bright green with red veins running through them and should not be wilted.

Storage

Before storing, the majority of the greens and their stems should be removed from the beets, as the attached greens draw moisture from the roots, which reduces their flavor and causes them to shrivel. Leave about 2 inches of the stems attached. Beets stored unwashed in a plastic bag in the refrigerator where they will keep for 2 weeks.

Handling

Rinse beets under running water, removing any visible traces of dirt, without breaking the skin. To keep the juices of the beets locked inside while cooking, leave the skin, tail, and an inch of the stem attached. The skin will be easier to remove after the beet is cooked.

The powerful red pigment in beets can stain items and surfaces such as dish towels, cutting boards, and sinks. Use gloves when handling beets to avoid staining your hands. If gloves are not used, salt can be used to easily remove stains from skin.

Nutrition

Beets are good sources of fiber and folate. Fiber aids in digestion and may play a role in reducing the risk of diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Folate is needed to produce healthy red blood cells. Beets also contain antioxidants which may reduce risk of heart disease, cancer, and other diseases.

School Meal Connection

Beets are considered “other” vegetables in the school meal lunch pattern. Despite their red color, beets do not have the same nutrient profile as other red/orange vegetables.



Harvest Season

According to the PA Preferred Seasonal Calendar, Pennsylvania beets are available from June through December.

Finding Beets

Child Nutrition Program operators may be able to find local beets in a variety of ways. Check with your produce distributor to learn what they have available. You can search for products through the PA Preferred website or connect with local producers through produce auctions or farmer's markets. The Food Trust has also developed a Guide to Local Produce in Keystone Schools which identifies producers who are interested in selling to schools.

Preparation

Beets can be microwaved, steamed, boiled, pickled, roasted or eaten raw. Grate, shave, or thinly slice raw beets and add them to salads or slaws. Roasting beets results in a particularly flavorful product since roasting concentrates the natural sugar found in beets rather than causing it to leach out, which can happen when they are cooked in liquid. Cooking beets with the skin on and the stem and root ends trimmed to about one inch maintains nutrients and color. The skin softens after cooking and can be easily removed.

Beets of different sizes cook at different rates. Select beets that are uniform in size to ensure even doneness. Beets are done when easily pricked with a fork.



Recipe | Magenta Root Slaw

64 servings (¼ cup)

Credits: ¼ cup provides ¼ cup additional vegetable.

Ingredients	Weight	Measure	Directions
Fresh ginger	2 oz		1. Peel and chop ginger. Pulse in a food processor fitted with a steel blade until ground.
Carrots	2 lb 6 oz		
Beets	2 lb 4 oz		
Parsnips	2 lb 4 oz		2. Trim and peel carrots, beets and parsnips. Shred in a food processor fitted with a shredding disc, or by hand.
Honey		¾ cup	
Lemon juice (fresh or bottled)		9 Tblsp	3. Whisk together honey, lemon juice and salt in a large bowl. Add the shredded vegetables and toss to combine.
Kosher salt		1 tsp	

Source: [VT New School Cuisine](#)



Check out the PA Harvest of the Month website (www.paharvestofthemonth.org) for sources, additional resources, and recipes.

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