

Guide to growing beetroot.

Beetroot is the ultimate beginner's vegetable that just keeps on giving. When sown monthly, you can keep harvesting all through the summer, from late April right into October. Delicious in curries, salads, or roasted whole, beetroots are also associated with a number of health benefits, including decreased blood pressure, improved blood flow, and increased exercise performance!

Sowing and Planting

Sow beetroot every few weeks throughout March to early July for a continuous supply. For March sowings, sow inside in module trays or pots. Cover early season sowings with fleece until all danger of frost has passed.

Multi-sow the modules with three seeds in each. Beetroot seeds are 'cluster' seeds, meaning that 1 seed is a cluster of seeds bunched together, so you will get more than 3 seedlings. Thin to 4 seedlings per module and plant out as a clump once the first true leaves are approx. 3cm.

From April to early July, you can direct sow seeds outdoors. They can be sown into beds in drills or sown in pots. Keep the soil well-watered until seedling have germinated to ensure they don't dry out.



Plant spacing

Plant your multi-sown modules 30cm apart to ensure they have enough room to grow to a good size. You can maximise space by planting closer together, you will just get smaller beets. If you are growing in pots, the same spacing applies. For direct-sown crops, sow seeds 5cm apart with 30cm between each row. Direct-sown crops can be planted closer together because they will not be growing in clumps of 4 like the multi-sown beets.



TOP TIPS

Beetroot really is a fool-proof crop, it isn't very needy and has very few pest or disease issues.

Beets do like to stay well-watered so make sure you're checking your soil every few days in spring and autumn and every day at the height of summer.

If you're sowing seeds in March, make sure to use the early variety called 'Boltardy'. Beetroots tend to flower in cold weather (this is called bolting and means the energy is being put into making a flower rather than a nice, juicy root) and 'Boltardy' is a good, bolt-resistant variety.



Varieties

Boltardy – a good, bolt-resistant variety to plant at the beginning of the growing season.

Detroit Red – round and a beautiful, deep dark red. The leafy tops can be used as a delicious spinach substitute.

Chioggia – an Italian heirloom variety, named after the fishing village where they were first grown. When cut, they have beautiful alternate pink and white rings, and they have a sweet and mildly earthy flavour.

Bull's Blood – one of the best to harvest as a baby beet and also a real dual-purpose beet as the leafy tops are deliciously sweet and tender and make a great addition to salads.

Cheltenham Green Top – heirloom variety that produces long, tapered roots. It has excellent flavour and the young leaves can be eaten as a salad.

Burpee's Golden – when cut, this variety reveals a bright yellow flesh that goes a gorgeous golden colour when cooked. It has a sweet flavour and great texture when picked at golf-ball size.

Harvesting

Beets can be ready within 40 days of germinating. The longer you leave your beets in the ground, the bigger they'll grow. Try harvesting them at various sizes and see if you have a preference. Smaller beets tend to be softer and slip from their skins after a quick boil, while bigger beets have a deep, earthy flavour that comes into its own when roasted with a bit of olive oil and thyme.

In the autumn, as growing slows, beets can be left in the ground until needed as long as there isn't a heavy frost.

To harvest from a clump, choose the beet you'd like and grab all its leaves. Use your other hand to press down on other beets in the clump to ensure they don't come up too. Twist and pull your chosen beet up and out of the soil then press the soil back down gently around the remaining clump.

For single beets, simply grab the leaves, twist and pull.

To enjoy your fresh beetroots, they are delicious roasted or boiled whole. Raw beets can also be peeled and grated into salads or juiced with other vegetables for a highly nutritious drink.

