

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

# Beets

**B**eets, planted in the spring, grow well in Kentucky. They are easy to grow and quick to mature. Both the roots and the leaves are edible.

## Varieties

The following varieties of beets grow well in the spring in Kentucky.

- **Red Cloud**—a dark red beet with a sweet flavor. The roots are smooth and can grow large. The stems are dark red with dark green leaves.
- **Avalanche**—a white beet with a mild and sweet flavor. It grows well and has nice tall tops. The stems and leaves are light green.
- **Chioggia Guardsmark**—a pink beet that is white and pink on the inside. The stems are slightly pink with light green leaves.
- **Touchstone Gold**—a golden beet that has orange skin and bright yellow flesh. It will keep this color even after being cooked. The leaves and stems are light green.



Red Cloud  
(Rachel Rudolph)



Avalanche  
(Rachel Rudolph)



Chioggia Guardsmark  
(Rachel Rudolph)



Touchstone Gold  
(Rachel Rudolph)



Harvested beet leaves rested on a fence railing.

## How much to plant

For one person, plan to grow beets in a 5- to 10-foot row. For a family of four, plan to plant a row of beets 10 to 20 feet long.

## How and when to plant

Beets can be grown from early spring through late fall, but they do not grow as well in the heat of summer. Beets grow best in the spring. They are moderately cold tolerant.

Region	Early planting	Late planting
Eastern	Late March	Mid-April
Central	Mid-March	Mid-April
Western	Mid-March	Early April

Plant beet seeds directly into the soil about ½ inch deep, and space each seed about 2 to 3 inches from the next seed. Lightly cover seeds with soil. If you want to plant more than one row of beets, space the rows about 18 inches apart. Many plants may grow from one beet seed. When plants have sprouted through the soil, thin out plants that are too close to each other. If plants are too close together, the roots will not have space to grow. Leave one beet plant every 2 to 3 inches.



Beet leaf with brown spots caused by Cercospora leaf spot. (Mourad Louadfel, Homemade, Bugwood.org)

Make sure that the soil stays moist, but not too wet. To keep beets growing for a longer time, seed new rows every three to four weeks in the spring. For more guidance on direct seeding or transplanting, refer to *Growing Your Own: Preparing Your Garden* (NEP-219) at [www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/NEP/NEP219/NEP219.pdf](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/NEP/NEP219/NEP219.pdf).

## Pests and diseases

Cercospora leaf spot is the most common disease that occurs on beets. This disease shows up as reddish-brown spots on the leaves. While the leaves are affected, the taste of the root is not. Trim leaves with spots and discard them. Aphids or flea beetles may also be seen on the leaves. Again, the leaves will be affected by these pests, but the roots will not. Sometimes spraying the leaves with a strong stream of water from a garden hose will knock off the pests. If the problem lasts, [contact your local county Extension agent](#).

## Harvesting

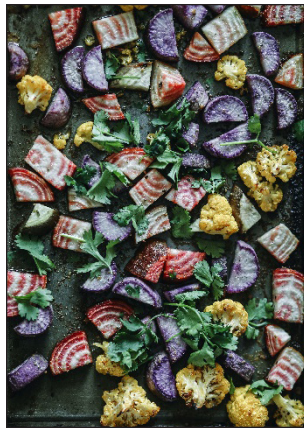
Harvest the leaves of the beets throughout the season. They will be best when smaller and more tender, about 6 to 8 inches long. To harvest, cut the leaves from the plant with a pair of scissors or garden clippers. Remove only a few leaves from each plant at one time and wait until more leaves grow back before harvesting more from that same plant. The root can be harvested when it is 1.5 to 2 inches wide. To harvest, pull upward where the leaves meet the top of the root. Brush the extra soil off the beet and gently rinse with water.

## Serving

Beets are good sources of fiber, folate, calcium, and vitamin C, and they are low in fat. One cup of cooked beets or one medium raw beet contains about 50 calories and 2 grams fiber.

**Beet leaves:** Rinse beet leaves under cool water, removing any visible traces of dirt. Use raw beet leaves in salads or process into pesto.

**Beet root:** Rinse beets under cool water, removing any visible traces of dirt. **TO BAKE:** Cut into ½-inch-thick cubes. Toss vegetables with olive oil and place in a single layer on a greased baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake at 400°F for 20 to 25 minutes, or until tender. Cool. Arrange vegetables on a serving dish and drizzle with dressing.



Colorful baked beets and cauliflower sprinkled with cilantro.



Both the leaves and the roots of beets may be eaten.

## Storing

The roots of the beets can be stored in plastic bags for 1 to 2 weeks in the refrigerator. You can also refrigerate the greens in plastic bags and use them within 2 to 3 days. Cooked beets may be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week.

## Clean up

Do not leave beets that were not harvested in the garden over the winter. They should be pulled up and composted or thrown out. Beets that are left behind may have pests or diseases that will affect next year's vegetable crop.



Beets planted in spring grow well in Kentucky and are quick to mature.

## Summary

### Varieties

There are many varieties of beets. Some grow better than others in Kentucky. Beet varieties that grow well in Kentucky are: Red Cloud, Avalanche, Chioggia Guardsmark, and Touchstone Gold.

### How much to plant

For one person, plan to grow a 5- to 10-foot row.

### How and when to plant

Beets can be grown from early spring through late fall, but they do not grow as well in the heat of summer. Beets grow best in the spring. Plant beet seeds about ½ inch deep and space each seed about 2 to 3 inches from the next seed. Lightly cover with soil.

### Pest and diseases

Cercospora leaf spot is the most common

disease that occurs on beets. This shows up as reddish-brown spots on the leaves. Trim leaves with spots and discard them. Aphids or flea beetles may also be seen on the leaves. Sometimes spraying the leaves with a strong stream of water from a garden hose will knock off the pests.

### Harvesting

Harvest the leaves when they are small and more tender, about 6 to 8 inches long. To harvest the leaves, cut the leaves from the plant with a pair of scissors or garden clippers. The root can be harvested when it is 1.5 to 2 inches wide. To harvest, pull upward where the leaves meet the top of the root.

### Serving

Use raw beet greens in salad or pesto. Bake beet root on baking sheet in the oven.

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### Storing

The roots of the beets can be stored in plastic bags for 1 to 2 weeks in the refrigerator. You can also refrigerate the leaves in plastic bags and use them within 2 to 3 days.

### Clean up

Do not leave beets that were not picked in the garden over the winter. They should be pulled up and composted or thrown out.

*Uncredited photos courtesy of Unsplash.*

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