



Easy Gardening Beets

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Beets are a cool-season crop and grow well in the cool temperatures of spring and fall. They do poorly in hot weather. Beets are well suited to large or small home gardens since they require little room. They are grown for both the roots which usually are pickled and the young tops which are used as greens.

Soil Preparation

Beets do well in most deep, well-drained, friable soils except tight clay. The soil should have adequate organic matter to prevent it from crusting. Hard, crusty soil causes beet roots to be tough. Beets do best in sandy soil in the spring and heavier soil in the fall because sandy soil warms faster than heavy clay soil.

Clear the planting area of rocks, trash and large sticks. Mix fine pieces of plant material such as grass, leaves and small sticks into the soil to enrich it. Spade the soil 8 to 10 inches deep. Be sure all plant material is covered with soil so it will break down quickly (Figure 1).

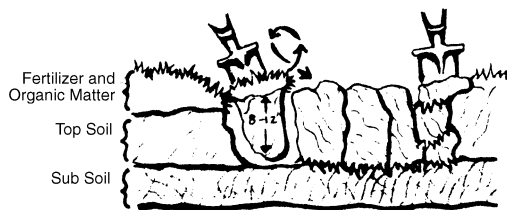


Fig. 1. Turn over the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. Use a spade or rototiller.

Fertilizing

Scatter 1 cup of a complete fertilizer such as 10-20-10 for each 10 feet of row. If the garden soil has a lot of

clay, add compost. Mix the fertilizer 4 inches into the soil with a rake and work into beds as shown (Figure 2). Beets are sensitive to soils deficient in boron. Have your soil tested or ask your county Extension agent about boron deficiencies in your area.

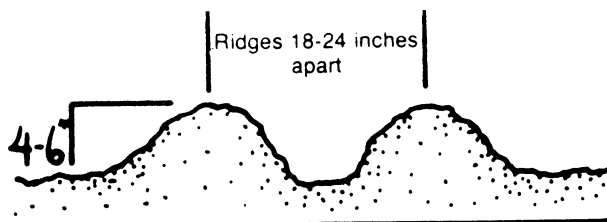


Fig. 2. Ridges are very important in low, poorly drained areas. They allow the soil to drain and let air enter.

Planting

Beets can be grown all winter in many South Texas areas. Farther north they should be planted as soon as the soil can be worked in spring. Soil temperature must be at least 40°F for beet seeds to sprout.

Using a hoe handle, stick or similar object, make a furrow 1/2 inch deep down the center of the ridge. Each beet seed produces 2 to 6 plants. Space the seeds 1 to 2 inches apart in the row. Cover seeds lightly with loose soil and sprinkle with water. Use seed treated with a fungicide to prevent the young plants from rotting. Plants should be up in 7 to 14 days. In hot weather, cover seed with sand or light colored mulch (Figure 3).



Fig. 3. Make a furrow 1/2 inch deep down the center of the ridge.

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For a continuous supply of beets, make several plantings 3 weeks apart. About 10 feet of row per person will provide beets to use fresh or for canning. They should be ready for harvest 7 to 8 weeks from planting.

Beets can be planted in partial shade, but their roots reach depths of 36 to 48 inches, so do not plant where tree roots will compete (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. Avoid areas where tree roots may be present.

Varieties

Beets are grown for both the root and top. The tops of any variety can be used for greens if harvested properly.

Varieties

Detroit Dark Red
Pacemaker

After Planting

Keep the beet plants free of weeds which use nutrients and moisture. Scratch the soil next to the plants with a rake or hand tool to prevent crusting. Do not work the soil more than 1 inch deep or the root systems may be injured. Water the plants well weekly if it does not rain. Begin thinning the beets as soon as they get crowded in the row. Young tops make excellent greens. After thinning, the plants should be 2 to 3 inches apart.

Scatter 1 tablespoon of fertilizer for each 10 feet of row beside the plants when they are 4 to 6 inches tall.

Insects



<u>Name and description</u>	<u>Control</u>
Flea beetle - 1/16 inch long; black, brown black with light markings; jumps quickly; eats holes in leaves	Check with your county Extension agent

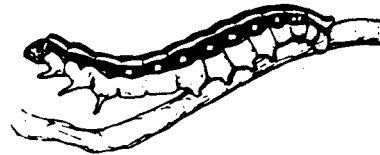
Beet webworm - 1 inch long; green, yellow, black stripe and spots on back; eats young plant leaves	Check with your county Extension agent
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Name and description Control

Aphid - 1/8 inch long; green, pink, red, brown; underside of leaves; sucks plant juices	Check with your county Extension agent
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Beet armyworm - 1 1/4 inches long; green with dark stripes on side; feeds on foliage	Check with your county Extension agent
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Before using a pesticide, read the label. Always follow cautions, warnings and directions.

Diseases

Diseases on beets are most severe in cloudy, damp weather. Check plants daily and treat with an approved fungicide if diseases appear. Ask your county Extension agent what to use. Always follow label directions.

Harvesting

Young, tender tops are the best quality, but tops can be used until they get large and strong flavored. Young plants can be cooked with the root and top together, or use the root alone when it is golf ball size or larger.

Pull the plants and cut off the root. If the tops are to be used, wash and place them in plastic bags in the refrigerator for 1 or 2 days. Roots will keep 1 to 2 weeks in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

Serving

Serve beets fresh, or preserve plain or pickled. Beet roots have small amounts of vitamins and minerals, while beet greens are an excellent source of vitamin A and calcium.

Cleanup

If all the beets are not used, pull them and place in a compost pile or spade them into the soil.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Zerle L. Carpenter, Director, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

500-7-95, Reprint

HORT 6-7