

# The Register-Guard

LIFE FOOD

COOKING

## Ah, sweet beets

From top to bottom and from morning till night, they're all-around pleasers

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**B**eets aren't just for borscht. Fresh beets are so versatile, you could eat them for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And dessert.

"Beets are great. More people need to learn to love beets," said Justin Moran, manager of Ruby and Amber's Farm in Dorena. "The greens have phenomenal nutrition, really excellent eating, and they have delicious roots."

The reason people usually don't like beets, Moran said, is because — like cabbage and collard greens — they were often overcooked when people ate them as children. "People boil the heck out of them."

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Beets are colorful and naturally sweet. They actually come in several colors, not just the familiar deep red, including white, yellow and striped red and white Chioggia varieties. According to the USDA's National Nutrient Database, beets have 58 calories per cup, along with 4 grams of fiber and 2 grams of protein. They're also high in folate and manganese. And their color, at least for red beets, comes from the antioxidants betanin and vulgaxanthin.

Red beets also have high amounts of oxalic acid, Moran said, which some people can be sensitive to and can contribute to the formation of kidney stones.

"Sometimes you taste it as a bitter taste in the back of your mouth. Red beets have a lot of it. In the golden beets, there's very little of it."

You can taste the difference the most in beet greens, he said. Beet greens from red beets have a stronger flavor, because of more oxalic acid, while beet greens from golden beets are much milder. No matter the color beet they come from, beet greens are packed full of calcium, iron and vitamins A and C.

Beets are plentiful this time of year and can be used in all their stages from baby beets and beet greens to big honking whoppers.

### Beets for breakfast

Starting with breakfast, try shredding beets rather than potatoes for hash browns, suggests Danielle Hummel, co-manage of Horton

Road Organics in Blachly.

"They're a little sweeter than potatoes," she said. But you prepare and cook beet hash browns the same way as the potato variety. Grate them and fry them in oil.

## Beet main dishes and sides

The options to turn beets into side dishes and main courses abound.

For beet greens, Moran likes to keep it simple. "I'll either steam or typically stir fry or sauté beet greens," he said.

Wash the greens and remove the stems. Then sauté in coconut oil for 1 to 2 minutes until just wilted.

"Then put a good glug of apple cider vinegar in it and serve it right away," Moran said. "That gets people excited about beet greens."

To roast baby beets, wash and trim the beet tops and roots. Then roast them in a skillet or Dutch oven for 25 minutes at 450 degrees, Moran said. "They're so small, they roast up perfectly like that."

You can also slice them thin and add them to a stir fry, just as you would with carrots.

For bigger beets, Moran suggests grating them, along with carrots, into a slaw. Add olive oil, lemon juice and vinegar to taste. "Let it sit in the dressing, so the oxalic acid breaks down."

Another beet side dish is Roast Beets and Arugula Salad, said Sherman Sherman, volunteer coordinator for the Friends of the Farmers' Market. Serve warm roasted beets on a bed of arugula, tossed with a balsamic vinegar dressing and topped with a generous serving of goat cheese. Friends of the Farmers' Market plans to demo the recipe in July at the Lane County Farmers' Market.

For a main dish, try Beet Risotto With Goat Cheese. "It's my favorite recipe," Moran said. "Big cubes of bright purple beet and the rich creamy whiteness of the goat's cheese."

## Dessert beets

Lastly, you can eat beets for dessert in the form of beet and chocolate cake. "It's absolutely off the hook," Moran said. "Beets and chocolate go really well together. The earthy sweetness really complements chocolate well."

## Buying beets

When it comes to buying beets, it's hard to go wrong, Hummel said. If you want to eat the beet greens as well, check the leaves for damage.

"Beet leaves are susceptible to Cercospora fungus which causes black, speckly holes in the leaves," she said.

Overall, though, "it's an easy vegetable to buy. Even the ones that are misshapen are good to eat. At the farmers' market, people look for small to medium beets, but even the big whoppers are tasty."

## Chocolate Beet Cake With Cream Cheese Frosting

*Makes one 9-inch cake.*

### For the cake:

4 medium beets

2 cups all-purpose flour

1½ cups granulated sugar

½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder

1½ teaspoons baking soda

¾ teaspoon salt

2 large eggs

¾ cup warm water  
¼ cup vegetable oil or butter  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

**For the frosting:**

8 ounces cream cheese, softened  
½ cup butter, softened  
2 tablespoons beet puree  
2 cups powdered sugar, sifted  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon milk

For the cake:

1. Wash, trim, peel and cut beets into 2-inch chunks. In a pot, cover beets with 2 inches of water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until beets are tender, about 30 minutes. Drain. Puree beets (for both cake and frosting) in a food processor until smooth. Allow to cool.
2. Preheat oven to 350. In a large bowl or electric mixer, whisk together flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt. Add eggs, water, oil, vanilla and 1¼ cups beet puree.
3. Coat a 9-inch round cake pan with cooking spray. Line the bottom with parchment paper and coat with cooking spray.
4. Pour batter into cake pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 45 minutes.
5. Remove from oven and allow to cool on a wire rack for 20 minutes. Turn out cake from pan and allow to cool completely.

For the frosting:

1. In a large bowl or electric mixer, beat cream cheese until pliable and smooth.
2. Add butter and beat until well combined, scraping bowl as needed.
3. Add beet puree and combine.
4. Add powdered sugar, vanilla extract and milk. Beat on medium speed until smooth.
5. Refrigerate for 30 minutes before frosting the cooled cake.

— Adapted from MarthaStewart.com's Chocolate Beet Cake and JoyTheBaker.com's Chocolate Beet Cake With Beet Cream Cheese Frosting.

## **Beet Risotto with Goat Cheese**

*Serves 4.*

4 cups chicken or vegetable broth  
5 cups water  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
3 medium-sized red or golden beets (about 1 pound)  
1 medium onion, finely chopped  
2 teaspoons salt  
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
1½ cups arborio rice  
4 teaspoon white wine vinegar  
3 tablespoons heavy cream  
2 ounces fresh firm goat cheese, crumbled

1. Bring broth and water to a boil. Reduce heat and gently simmer.
2. Peel beets, then chop into small cubes.
3. In a wide pot or sauté pan, add butter and oil and heat on medium heat until butter melts. Add onions, beet cubes, 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper and sauté until softened and translucent, about 10 minutes.
4. Add rice and cook, stirring constantly, for about 2 minutes.
5. Add 1½ cups broth, white wine vinegar and remaining 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper.
6. Reduce heat to medium and simmer, stirring constantly, until liquid has evaporated.
7. Continue adding broth, 3/4 cup at a time, stirring constantly as the rice simmers and absorbs the liquid.
8. Continue cooking until rice is tender, about 30-40 minutes total. About 2 minutes before rice is al dente, add cream.
9. Serve and top with goat cheese.

— Adapted from Epicurious.com's Beet Risotto.

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