

# Growing Beets

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## Selecting and Preparing a Site

Choose a site that receives full sunlight. Beets should ideally receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day. Beets prefer deep, loose, fertile soils with a pH between 6.0 and 7.0. Beets will not do well in acidic soils (pH below 6.0). The soil should be free of rocks and other obstacles to allow the roots to grow freely. Because beets are closely related to Swiss chard and spinach they are susceptible to similar pest and diseases. Avoid growing beets in areas where those vegetables were grown in the past two years. Beets also do not do well near black walnuts.



## Planting

Recommended red varieties of beets include Kestrel, Red Cloud, Red Ace, Ruby Queen, Frono, Detroit Dark Red strains, and Rodina. Golden is a recommended yellow variety and Chiogga is a red-and-white striped variety.

It is generally recommended to sow beets directly in the garden instead of starting seeds indoors and transplanting them into a garden so as not to disturb the roots. Add aged compost prior to planting. Soak seeds in warm water for 24 hours prior to planting to speed germination. Plant seeds ½-inch deep and 1 to 2 inches apart. If planting multiple rows they should be approximately 12 to 18 inches apart. After planting, cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil.

Beets can be planted in the spring as soon as the soil is workable and through the summer as long as daytime temperatures do not exceed 75°F. For a fall harvest, beets should be planted about 4 to 6 weeks before the first fall frost.



## Caring for the Site

Each beet “seed” is actually a cluster of several seeds, so thinning is necessary to prevent them from competing for nutrients and sun in the same space. When the beet’s leaves are about 2 to 3 inches tall use fine-tipped gardening shears to cut off leaves at ground level of the least robust seedlings in each cluster.

Apply mulch and water regularly. Weed as needed, being careful not to disturb the beets’ shallow roots. Fertilize beets when sprouts first appear and again one month later, following manufacturer’s recommendation. Do not use a high-nitrogen fertilizer as this can result in poor root growth.



## Harvesting

Most varieties require 55 to 70 days for maturity. When it is time to harvest, gently loosen the soil around the root with a spade or fork and pull the beet from the earth. Harvest beets when they are between 1½ to 2 inches in diameter, about the size of a golf ball. If they grow larger than 3 inches they tend to get tough and woody.

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Developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Penn State University (Project PA).

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organization imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.