

The Benefits of Beets

By Louisa Lee

Beets are a type of root vegetable that can be grown locally from June to December. You can buy beets year round. There are two parts of the beet which you can eat and both are nutritious: the bulb (or root) of the beet and the green leafy tops.

Nutrition and Beets

Beets are low in calories and a good source of potassium and the B-vitamin, folate. Beet greens are great sources of potassium, vitamin K and carotenoids, a type of antioxidant found naturally in food.

The following table lists some of the functions of a few of the vitamins and minerals found in beets. Canada's Food Guide recommends eating a variety of vegetables and fruit each day. This will help you get some of vitamins and minerals that your body needs to stay healthy.

Nutrient (and where it is found in the beet)	Function
Folate (bulb)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps make red blood cells. If you don't have enough folate in your diet, you can get a type of anemia and may feel tired, weak and find it difficult to focus.
Potassium (bulb and greens)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Important for the health of nerves and muscles, including the heart muscle.• Helps to control water balance.
Vitamin K (greens)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps to make proteins that cause your blood to clot when you are bleeding.• Helps build and activate proteins that keep your bones strong.
Carotenoids (greens)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Antioxidants in foods that may reduce the risk of eye disease, some cancers and heart disease.• Some types turn into vitamin A in the body. An example of this is beta-carotene.

Tips to get the most out of the nutrients from cooking beets:

- Beet greens should look crisp and bright and beet bulbs should be firm with smooth skins.
- Cut beet green tops off one inch (2.5 cm) from the bulb and store them separately from the bulbs. If attached to the bulb, the beet greens can remove moisture from the bulb.
- In the refrigerator, store beets in a covered container for up to 3-4 weeks.
- Wash beets gently before cooking.
- Leave the one inch of the beet green tops on and do not peel beets before cooking. Peeling the beet after cooking helps to retain colour and flavour.

Food Safety Tips on Fruits and Vegetables

For food safety information about buying, storing and washing fresh fruits and vegetable, refer to these links:

Food Safety Facts for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CFIA):

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/specif/fruvege.shtml>

Safe Handling of Leafy Greens (Health Canada):

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/handl-manipul/safety-salubrite/leafy-feuille-eng.php>

Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC provides free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca or call 8-1-1.

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