**“Stay True To Your Roots”**

1. **What are beets?**
2. Beets are a tuberous root vegetable that belong to the *Amarathaceae* family. Its scientific name is Beta vulgaris.
3. The green, leafy portion of the beet is also edible. These greens are delicious. Both beets and Swiss chard are different varieties within the same plant family and their edible leaves share a resemblance in both taste and texture. The young leaves can be added raw to salads, or served boiled or steamed, in which case they have a taste and texture similar to spinach.
4. Attached to the beet's green leaves is the round or oblong root, the part conjured up in most people's minds by the word "beet." Although typically a beautiful reddish-purple hue, beets also come in varieties that feature white, golden/yellow or even rainbow color roots.
5. Known in North America as the “beet”, other common names include: table beet, garden beet, red beet, or golden beet.
6. Usually the deep purple roots of beetroot are eaten boiled, roasted or raw, and either alone or combined with any salad vegetable. A large proportion of the commercial production is processed into boiled and sterilized beets or into pickled beets. Pickled beets are a traditional food in many countries.
7. In Eastern Europe, beet soup, called borscht, is a popular dish. Many regional recipes for borscht have also developed.
8. In Indian cuisine, chopped, cooked, spiced beet is a common side dish.
9. Beets' sweet taste reflects their high sugar content, which makes beets an important source for the production of refined sugar.
10. While beets are available throughout the year, their season runs from June through October when the youngest, most tender beets are easiest to find.
11. Other than as a food, beet juice can be used as a food coloring to improve the color of tomato paste, sauces, dessert, jams and jellies, ice cream, sweets
12. **History of Beets**
13. The wild beet, the ancestor of the beet with which we are familiar today, is thought to have originated in prehistoric times in North Africa and grew wild along Asian and European seashores. In these earlier times, people exclusively ate the beet greens and not the roots.
14. The ancient Romans were one of the first civilizations to cultivate beets to use their roots as food. The tribes that invaded Rome were responsible for spreading beets throughout northern Europe where they were first used for animals and later for human consumption, becoming more popular in the 16th century.
15. Beets' value grew in the 19th century when it was discovered that they were a concentrated source of sugar, and the first sugar factory was built in Poland. When access to sugar cane was restricted by the British, Napoleon decreed that the beet be used as the primary source of sugar, catalyzing its popularity.
16. Around this time, beets were also first brought to the United States, where they now flourish. Today the leading commercial producers of beets include the United States, the Russian Federation, France, Poland, France and Germany.
17. **Health Benefits**
    1. The beet is very low in calories and contain zero cholesterol and small amount of fat. Its nutrition benefits come particularly from fiber, vitamins, minerals, and unique plant derived anti-oxidants.
    2. Beets are highly nutritious and “cardiovascular health” friendly root vegetables. Certain unique pigment antioxidants in the root as well as in its top-greens have been found to offer protection against coronary artery disease and stroke, lower cholesterol levels within the body, and have anti-aging effects.
    3. Beets are unique in their rich combination of betalain pigments. Both betacyanins (red-violet pigments) and betaxanthins (yellow pigments) can be found in beets. Betanin has gotten special attention in beet research.
    4. Beets are also an excellent source of folate and a very good source of manganese, potassium and copper. They are also a good source of dietary fiber, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin C, iron and vitamin B6.
    5. The beetroot contain small amounts of vitamin-C; however, its top greens are an excellent source of this vitamin. Vitamin C is one of the powerful natural antioxidants.
    6. Remember all those legendary Russian centenarians? Beets, frequently consumed either pickled or in borscht, the traditional Russian soup, may be one reason behind their long and healthy lives!
18. **Growing, Selection, Storage, and Preparation**

Generally, 60 days are needed from germination to harvest of the root. All cultivars can be harvested earlier for use as greens. If not harvested at the right time, it keeps growing in size to more than a pound and may develop surface cracks, lose taste and become less appetizing because of excess fiber content.

* 1. Selection & Storage
     1. In the store, choose fresh, bright, firm textured beets with rich flavor and uniform size. Avoid those soft in consistency, over-mature and large. Choose small or medium-sized beets whose roots are firm, smooth-skinned and deep in color. Smaller, younger beets may be so tender that peeling won't be needed after they are cooked. Whenever possible, go for organic produce to get maximum health benefits.
     2. If you are buying whole vegetable, severe tops greens from its root as soon as possible since they rob moisture and nutrition from the roots.
     3. Beet greens, just like other greens, should be washed thoroughly to remove soil, sand, dirt, and any insecticide residues before use.
     4. Top beet greens should be used while they are fresh. Beetroot, however, can be kept in the refrigerator for a few weeks.
     5. While the quality of the greens does not reflect that of the roots, if you are going to consume this very nutritious part of the plant, look for greens that appear fresh, tender, and have a lively green color.
     6. Store the unwashed greens in a separate plastic bag squeezing out as much of the air as possible. Place in refrigerator where they will keep fresh for about four days.
     7. Raw beets do not freeze well since they tend to become soft upon thawing. Freezing cooked beets is fine; they'll retain their flavor and texture.
  2. Preparation
     1. To prepare, gently scrub and wash the roots in clean running water before use in order to remove sand, soil, and dirt. Peel the tough outer layer using a vegetable peeler. Cut the root into chunks, squares, or thin slices as you may desire.
     2. Raw beet roots have a crunchy texture that turns soft and buttery when they are cooked. Beet leaves have a lively, bitter taste similar to chard.
     3. Here are some serving tips:
        1. The root may be eaten raw in salads with carrot, radish, cucumber, cabbage etc.
        2. Steam the small cubes and serve warm with butter as a delicacy.
        3. Pickled beets are a part of the traditional food in the southern American states.
        4. Beet juice is a popular health drink.
        5. Boil roots in curries with other vegetables such as carrots, potato, tomato, etc.
        6. Enjoy as a side dish with added olive oil, vinegar or lemon juice.
     4. Since beet juice can stain your skin, wearing kitchen gloves is a good idea when handling beets. If your hands become stained during the cleaning and cooking process, simply rub some lemon juice on them to remove the stain.

1. **Fun Facts**
2. A traditional Pennsylvania Dutch dish is pickled beet egg. Hard-boiled eggs are refrigerated in the liquid left over from pickling beets and allowed to marinate until the eggs turn a deep pink-red color.
3. In Poland and Ukraine, beet is combined with horseradish to form popular *ćwikła*, which is traditionally used with cold cuts and sandwiches.
4. Popular in Australian hamburgers, a slice of pickled beetroot is combined with fried egg and sometimes pineapple (as well as the usual beef patty, barbecue sauce and salad) to make an *Aussie burger*.
5. Food shortages in Europe following World War I caused great hardships, including cases of *mangelwurzel disease*, as relief workers called it. It was symptomatic of eating only beets.
6. The red color compound betanin is not broken down in the body, and in higher concentrations may temporarily cause urine and stool to assume a reddish color. These deceptive appearances are completely harmless and subside once the betanin is out of the system.
7. One of the earliest known benefits of the red beet is its use as an aphrodisiac during the Roman times. And it wasn’t all folklore, as it has been found to contain high amounts of boron, which is directly related to the production of human sex hormones.
8. From the hit TV series, “The Office,” Dwight is a devoted beet farmer. Living on his family’s 60-acre beet farm, in a nine bedroom, one bathroom farmhouse, Dwight sells his beets at a roadside “beat stand.”
9. If you boil beets in water and then massage the cooled down water into your scalp each night, it is said to be an effective cure for dandruff.
10. In 1975, during the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, cosmonauts from the USSR’s Soyuz 19 welcomed the Apollo 18 astronauts by preparing a banquet of borscht (beet soup) in zero gravity.

We hope you enjoyed learning more about beets! This is the perfect time of year to add fresh, nutritious beets to your diet.