

Health Benefits of Beets

By Stephanie Polizzi, MPH, RDN

With the season of red and green before us, consider adding beets to your holiday menu. The beet root (red or orange varieties) and beet greens are highly nutritious. Beets are low in calories and because they are plants, contain no cholesterol.



Both

Beet roots are juicy, red or orange morsels of nutrition. The striking color comes from a powerful antioxidant that has been shown to defend against cancer, heart disease and stroke. When consumed raw, beet roots contain nitrates which can lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol and improve circulation. Athletes who consume raw beet roots improve both athletic stamina and performance. Beet roots also contain a good amount of potassium that helps regulate metabolism and protects against high blood pressure.

Note: Some people notice red-stained urine after consuming beet roots, but this is harmless.

Beet greens are high in B vitamins, including folate, which helps form healthy red blood cells important for carrying oxygen to tissues. Beet greens are an excellent source of vitamin C, beta carotene and other antioxidants that fight aging and disease. In addition to vitamins, these greens also contain minerals like iron and magnesium that protect arteries and bones.

When choosing fresh beets, select bright, firm beet roots with intact bright greens. When you get them home, wash thoroughly to remove sand, dirt and insecticide residues. Chop off greens and store them separately from the roots, since the greens can absorb moisture and nutrition from the roots.

Both beet roots and beet greens can be consumed raw. Peel the outer layer of roots and grate into fresh salads for a mild, citrus flavor. You can also toss into cabbage slaws or cucumber salads. Use raw beet greens in salads and smoothies, or as a sandwich topper.

Roasting brings out the best flavor for cooked beet roots with just a brushing of olive oil, salt and pepper. Steamed or slightly sautéed beet greens can be a great side dish with a drizzle of olive oil or lemon juice. Or toss raw greens into cooked soups or stews just minutes before serving.

Make beets a bright addition to your holiday meals for red and green accents that provide color, texture, flavor and an abundance of good nutrition.