

# Renee's Articles: Unbeatable Beets

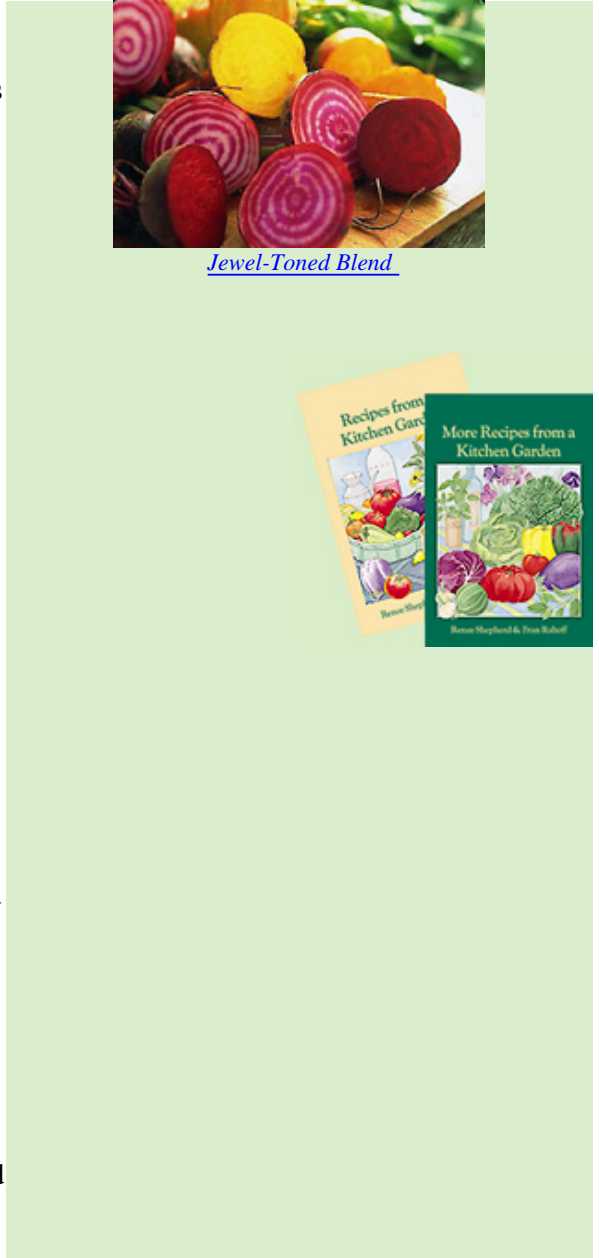
Beets from your own garden taste terrific. Forget any old memories of rubbery, syrupy-sauced, canned beets that lurk in your tastebuds. Freshly pulled beets are truly beautiful and delicious. Their flavor is sweet, rich, hearty and earthy, and beet varieties come in jewel tones of deep crimson, golden yellow and even candy-striped red and white roots.

Growing fresh beets is simple and rewarding in all US climate zones. Both the attractive red-veined leaves and roots are edible, and beets produce high yields in a small spaces – a real plus if garden room is at a premium. Beets make a fine spring crop and a good second planting in midsummer will yield a long lasting fall harvest. Beets grow happily in any well amended soil (phosphorus is important, so we add bonemeal and compost) with good drainage in full sun.

Each big beet seed cluster is actually composed of 3 or 4 smaller seeds which often all germinate in a clump, so planting beets at the proper spacing of at least an inch apart, and then thinning them early, is critical to having a good harvest of shapely mature roots. I am also careful to tamp the soil firmly over the irregularly shaped seeds to assure good contact with the soil.

Begin thinning seedlings when they are just an inch or two tall to about 2 inches apart. Remove every other one along the row to give every plant more space. You can toss the little leafy thinnings into a delicious early green salad. Then thin plants again as they grow until they are 3 or 4 inches apart.

Feed growing beet plants with a good well-balanced fertilizer several times during their growing season. Plan to harvest some of the roots at baby size of 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter, and let some grow to maturity at 3 to 4 inches. Beet greens are a great bonus. When young and tender, they are scrumptious and colorful in mixed garden salads. Mature beet greens can be used like chard or spinach – I like them simply braised in rich chicken broth.



Beet roots are more versatile than many realize. Scrub them well, then cook whole without peeling. Leave an inch of the tops on to keep them from bleeding their color. Steam, boil or wrap with foil and bake in a 400 degree oven until tender (30 to 40 minutes) for most mouthwatering sweet flavor. This winter I've enjoyed them peeled and cut up in chunks to roast in the oven with carrots and onions. Finished off with olive oil and a little balsamic vinegar, this is a fine cool weather treat.

I also enjoy fresh beets cooked, then sliced, chilled and added to green salad along with toasted walnuts. Potato salad made with cubed, cooked beets turns a lovely, creamy pink color to accent with lots of fresh chives. Beets' flavor is good with citrus; reheat cooked sliced beets in sweet butter, then squeeze over fresh orange or tangerine or lime juice. Kitchen garden herbs that enhance beets' flavor include chives, dill, fennel, garlic chives, lemon thyme, parsley, mint, chervil and tarragon. One of my favorite seafood salads is slices of freshly cooked and chilled golden and red beets dressed with lots of snipped green dill leaf and topped with plump shrimp. Dress with a vinaigrette made with fresh

lemon juice, minced garlic, nice olive oil and a touch of cayenne pepper for a lovely lunch with rye or other hearty bread

## **Romanian Summer Soup**

For a hot summer day or evening. The soup is as flavorful as it is beautiful. Serve chilled or at room temperature with thick slices of pumpernickel or fresh rye bread and butter.



6 medium beets, including tops  
2 medium onions  
8 cups chicken stock  
1 cup sour cream  
1 cup plain fresh yogurt  
2 medium cucumbers, peeled and coarsely chopped  
1 bunch radishes, thinly sliced  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
salt & pepper to taste  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

Peel the beets and cut into julienne strips. Wash and coarsely chop the beet greens and chop the onions. In a large pot, heat the chicken stock and add the beets, beet greens and onions. Cook covered until the beets are tender, about 20 minutes. Remove from heat. Cool to room temperature, and then stir in the sour cream and yogurt. Add the chopped cucumber, radishes and the lemon juice. Correct seasoning, adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve in individual bowls with fresh dill sprinkled on top. Serves 8

## **Lemon Lovers' Beets**

1 lemon  
2 tablespoons butter  
1 tablespoon sugar  
8 small to medium cooked beets, quartered (or use baby beets)  
1 tablespoon chopped parsley



Grate the lemon rind and reserve. Squeeze juice. Melt butter in a sauce-pan and add the sugar and lemon juice. Cook over moderate heat about 5 minutes or until slightly syrupy. Add the cooked beets and heat through, stirring. Garnish with the lemon rind and chopped parsley and serve. Serves 2 to 3

## **Beet and Green Apple Salad**

A crisp and absolutely beautiful salad that came to us from a wonderful young friend who cooks from the garden for twelve hungry organic farmers every day!

5 to 6 medium to large beets (about 1 ½ pounds)  
½ small red onion, chopped  
2 tart green apples, cut in halves, cored and thinly sliced (unpeeled)

### *Dressing:*

1 shallot, minced  
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard  
1 teaspoon horseradish  
1 ½ teaspoons red wine vinegar  
¼ teaspoon celery seed  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
¼ teaspoon salt  
freshly ground pepper to taste

### *Garnish:*

1/3 cup chopped green onions

2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

Wash beets, but do not peel. Place in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and cook until tender when pierced with a sharp knife. Cool, peel, and cut in half, then slice halves into thin slices. Place beets in a salad bowl with onion and apple slices. Combine dressing ingredients and toss with salad. Garnish with scallions and dill, and serve. Serves 6 to 8