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ELS = Eat, Learn, Sell – Eating by Example – 02.12.16

BEETS

Beets have the highest sugar content (brix) of any vegetable yet they are very low in calories. Beet greens are actually more nutritious than the beet root as the greens contain twice the potassium and are exceptionally high in beta carotene and folic acid. Classically beets are known as a canned vegetable, but this is changing and beets of all types are being served raw, roasted, pickled and juiced because of their high nutrient content and delicious flavor.

When beets are fresh, they are known in the kitchen as a ‘twofer’, because they provide two different vegetables. Both the dense taproot vegetable and the leafy greens are edible. There are many types of beets that fall under the botanical species *Beta vulgaris*: Table beets, the vegetable that is sold for culinary uses; Sugar beets, known for processing and not eating; mangelwurzels, large bulbous beets used for animal feed; foliage beets, grown for topsoil maintenance; Swiss chard, grown for their greens and not roots.

All beet types are descended from a wild, slender rooted vegetable (now cultivated as the heirloom cylinder or forono beet). Until just two hundred years ago, only the TOPS –or greens- of beets were eaten because the roots were not fully developed.

Peeing Red – yup, it’s a thing. An estimated 10-15% of all U.S. adults experience *beeturia*, or a reddening of the urine after consuming red beets in everyday amounts. This segment of the population can not metabolize betacyanin, the group of pigments responsible for the reddish-purple color of beets.

Sugar beets provide about 30% of the world’s sugar. Sugar beets, by weight, are about twenty percent sucrose – twice the sugar content of table beets.

Mangelwurzels are big and grown to feed livestock (see right).



Table beet varieties:

Red Beet - Red beets are made up of both an edible root and edible leaves, 10-12 inch red and green leafy stems ascend from red beet's ruby red, smooth, bulbous root. Small or medium beets are generally more tender than larger ones. As beets have the highest sugar content of any vegetable, their flavor is typically sweet. Beets can sometime contain mineral flavors from the earth in which they have been grown.



(The microgreen 'Bull's Blood' is a petite sprouting version of the greens of the Bull's Blood beet.)



Gold Beet – The Gold beet is made up of both an edible root and edible leaves. The root is pale orange, swollen and globular, reaching sizes of up to four inches in diameter. The root's variegated golden-orange flesh is firm, earthy and sweet. With a sweet flavor that is less tinged with minerals, this beautiful beet is a great vegetable to use when the diners are a little 'beet' leery!

Chioggia Beet – The Chioggia beet, AKA Candy Stripe and Bull's Eye beet, is a biennial plant grown almost exclusively as a table beet. It is a member of the Chenopodiaceae family, which also includes spinach, chard, orach and quinoa. From the outside, this is a rather non-descript beet, but once cut open, a gorgeous bulls-eye is formed in the center of this root with concentric circles of pink and white. Chioggia beets inherently contain the highest content of geosmin, an organic compound which gives them a deep earthy flavor and aroma. Cooked Chioggia beets will not retain their brilliant coloring, rather fade to paler versions of their original colors.



Sample menu items:

- Borscht (beet soup)
- Winter Caprese (roasted beets with burrata cheese)
- Citrus, Fennel and Beet salad
- Shredded root slaw