

TO BEET OR NOT TO BEET....

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HEALTH BENEFITS OF EATING BEETS

When most of us think of beets, we think of borscht or the canned beets our grandma would serve with Sunday dinner. Beets have an earthy, sweet taste and can be surprisingly versatile. They are an excellent source of folate, very good sources of potassium, manganese, copper and good sources of vitamin C,

CHOOSE BEETS WITH ROOTS THAT ARE FIRM AND DEEP IN COLOUR WITH DARK GREEN LEAFY TOPS. AVOID BEETS THAT HAVE SOFT SPOTS OR BRUISING. STORE BEETS IN THE FRIDGE.

fibre and iron.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the health benefits of eating beets. Beets contain a unique source of antioxidants called "betalains". Betalains

are the pigments responsible for giving beets their rich colour. Betacyanins are predominant in red-violet beets whereas betaxanthins are the main pigment in yellow beets. Long cooking times can negatively affect the content of the betalain content of the beets so consider eating them raw or lightly steamed. Betalains have also been shown to interfere with inflammatory signaling and may play a role in managing inflammation.

EASY WAYS TO INCLUDE BEETS IN YOUR DIET:

1. Add finely chopped or grated raw beets to salads.
2. Peel and quarter beets (may want to wear rubber gloves). Boil beets in orange juice and serve as a hot vegetable.
3. Roast or steam beets and peel after cooking. Small young beets may not require peeling.
4. Blend beets with carrots, ginger and apple juice to create a fresh veggie juice.
5. Puree beets and add to hummus.

Beets have also been getting the attention of endurance athletes as a performance enhancer. Beets are rich in naturally occurring nitrates which are converted to nitric oxide in the body. Nitric oxide causes vasodilation in the body which relaxes muscles and increases blood flow throughout the body.

Several studies have shown drinking beet juice or eating beets can help muscles work at their best particularly during intense endurance activities. Trained cyclists experienced an increase in their time to exhaustion when beet juice was included in their diet. Another study with cyclists found that beetroot juice supplementation improved efficiency and performance by increasing power output and decreasing the time required to travel a set distance. Runners who participated in a 5k race test ran 5% faster in the last 1.8 k of the race. Other studies on rowers, swimmers, divers and even walkers have shown improved performance measurements.

The studies vary in terms of portions of beets and whether cooked beets or beet juice was used and also in terms of the length of time for supplementation – one time dose or up to 15 days of supplementation. The performance enhancing effects seemed to occur 2.5 hours after consumption so timing of intake is an issue.

Whether you are looking to increasing your antioxidants and nutrient rich foods intake or possibly enhancing your performance to achieve your next physical activity goal, beets are a beneficial addition to your diet.



Beet and Goat Cheese Salad

Recipe by Michael Smith, Chef at Home, Food Network Canada

Ingredients

4 large beets, washed and trimmed
2 tbsp olive oil
Salt and pepper
½ cup goat's cheese
Olive oil for drizzling
Balsamic vinegar for drizzling
1 bunch of chopped Italian parsley

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F
2. Place the beets on a sheet of tin foil and drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper
3. Wrap tightly and place on a baking sheet
4. Roast for 1 hour or until easily pierced with a fork
5. Unwrap and when beets are cool enough to handle, peel them and slice into wedges.
6. Place in a salad bowl and drizzle with olive oil and vinegar to taste
7. Crumble goat cheese over top and garnish with parsley and black pepper. Toss and enjoy!