Beets are a cool-season crop and grow well in the cool temperatures of spring and fall. They do poorly in hot weather. Beets are well suited to large or small home gardens since they require little room. They are grown for both the roots which usually are pickled and the young tops which are used as greens. About 10 feet of row per person will provide enough beets to use fresh or for canning.

**Site selection**

Beets can be planted in partial shade and grow best in deep, well drained soils. Beets have deep roots that can reach depths of 36 to 48 inches, so do not plant them where tree roots will compete (Fig. 1).

**Soil preparation**

Before planting, make sure the soil is free of rocks, trash and large sticks. Mix fine pieces of plant material such as grass, leaves and small sticks into the soil to enrich it. Spade the soil 8 to 10 inches deep.

![Figure 1](image1.png)
**Figure 1.** Avoid areas where there may be tree roots.

![Figure 2](image2.png)
**Figure 2.** Turn the soil over to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. Use a spade or rototiller.
Using a hoe handle, stick or similar object, make a furrow ½ inch deep down the center of the ridge (Fig. 4). Each beet seed produces 2 to 6 plants. Space the seeds 1 to 2 inches apart in the row. Cover seeds lightly with loose soil and sprinkle with water. Use seed treated with a fungicide to prevent the young plants from rotting. Plants should be up in 7 to 14 days. In hot weather, cover seed with sand or light-colored mulch.

For continuous supply of beets, make several plantings 3 weeks apart.

**Fertilizing**

Scatter 1 cup of a complete fertilizer such as 10-20-10 for each 10 feet of row. If the garden soil has a lot of clay, add compost. Mix the fertilizer 4 inches into the soil with a rake and work into beds as shown in Figure 2. Scatter 1 tablespoon of fertilizer for each 10 feet of row beside the plants when they are 4 to 6 inches tall.

**Watering**

Water the plants well weekly if it does not rain. Beet root systems can reach 36 inches or more if adequate soil moisture is available.

**Care during the season**

Keep the beet plants free of weeds which use nutrients and moisture. Scratch the soil next to the plants with a rake or hand tool to prevent crusting. Do not work the soil more than 1 inch deep or the root systems may be injured. Begin thinning...
or 2 days. Roots will keep 1 to 2 weeks in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

If all the beets are not used, pull them and place in a compost pile or spade them into the soil.

Insects

Many insecticides are available at garden centers for homeowner use. Sevin® is a synthetic insecticide, while Bt-based insecticides and sulfur are organic options. Sulfur also has fungicidal properties and helps control many diseases. Before using a pesticide, read the label and always follow cautions, warnings and directions.

Diseases

Diseases on beets are most severe in cloudy, damp weather. Check plants daily and treat them with an approved fungicide if diseases appear. Neem oil, sulfur, and other fungicides are available for use. Always follow label directions.

Serving

Beets can be served fresh, or they can be preserved plain or pickled. Beet roots contain small amounts of vitamins and minerals, while beet greens are an excellent source of Vitamin A and calcium.
Acknowledgments

This publication was revised from earlier versions written by Jerry Parsons, former Professor and Extension Horticulturist, and Sam Cotner, Professor Emeritus and Extension Horticulturist.

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Revision