

# SFA

*Seeds for Africa*

## Beetroot

Beetroot is in the top 10 most popular vegetables for growing in our gardens. Growing Beetroot is popular because it is relatively easy to grow and Beetroot can be eaten fresh, stored and pickled making it a crop that can be enjoyed all year round.

### PREPARATION:

Dig over the soil in autumn prior to sowing but do not add manure to the soil as this will cause the roots to develop incorrectly. When digging the soil make sure to remove any stones as these can restrict root growth. If the soil is acidic then add the appropriate amount of lime.

### SOWING:

Beetroot should not be sowed until after the last frost. Sowing can be brought forward a few weeks if you use a poly tunnel or cloche. Soak your beetroot seeds for a few hours before sowing. Each seed cluster actually contains one to four seeds. You can sow the seeds in seedling pots and then transplant the seedlings into the final growing position but some find higher success rates if sowing directly into the soil.

If sowing in rows then leave around 30cm between rows. Sow the seeds at around 1 inch depth and cover with soil. Sow seed clusters around 5cm apart.

After sowing make sure the soil remains damp until the seeds have germinated and you can see the emerging seedlings.

Beetroot can also be grown in containers. Fill a pot 30cm in diameter with potting compost and sow about 6 seed clusters at 2.5cm depth. Thin the seed cluster seedlings as described above.

#### **POSITION:**

Beetroot will grow in part shade or full sun. If in full sun make sure the soil doesn't dry out.

#### **SOIL TYPE:**

Beetroot likes a non-acidic soil - around PH 6.5-7.0. Beetroot will grow well in a medium to light soil, digging over will help heavy soils.

#### **TENDING:**

When the seedlings emerge there may be more than one from each seed cluster. Remove all but the strongest seedling from each seed cluster.

After the seedlings have reached about 5cm in height you can thin them to their final positions - about 10cm for the Globe varieties and about 15cm for the long varieties.

Do not let the soil dry out as this can reduce the growth rate and the roots can become woody and less succulent.

#### **HARVESTING:**

Globe beetroots are at their most tender and greatest flavour when they are around 3cm in diameter. When harvesting the beetroot it makes sense to harvest equally from each row so that more space is left between beets that remain in the ground. This will help their development.

When the size of globe varieties reaches about 7.5 cm in diameter they should be harvested as any further growth will make them less palatable. Gently dig under the root with a trowel and lift the bulb out of the soil taking care not to damage the outer skin. The less the bulb is damaged the longer the beetroot can be stored for.

Harvested beetroots are delicious when pickled but can also be stored in a dry cool environment such as a wooden box filled with sand.

Not many people realise that the beetroot leaves are also edible and can be used in similar ways to spinach. They should be eaten fresh.

#### **VARIETIES:**

There are two main type of Beetroot varieties - Round (or globe) beetroots and long beetroots. Globe varieties have spherical shaped roots and long varieties are similar in shape to parsnips. Long varieties roots can reach up to about 10 inches in length and they tend to take longer to develop than the globe varieties. Check Seeds for Africa for a large range of beet seeds.

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