

HOW TO GROW AND SAVE SEED FROM BEETS

BETA VULGARIS



How to Grow Beets (*Beta vulgaris*)

Beets belong to the same species as Swiss Chard, so when growing for seed, do not plant both crops at the same time. Beets are tasty and easy to grow, and both the roots and leaves can be used in cooking.

Time of Planting: Plant in early spring, as soon as soil can be worked. You can plant successive plantings until midsummer.

Spacing Requirements: Plant 3/4 inch deep and 1 inch apart in rows 12-18 inches apart.

Time to Germination: 5-8 days

Special Considerations: When growing beets for seed, spacing needs to be significantly increased, and staking the plants is recommended for support.

Common Pests and Diseases (and how to manage): Beets are typically not affected by pests and diseases, but may be affected by: black bean aphid, boron deficiency, birds, and slugs.

Harvest (when and how): Harvest beets 60-90 days after planting, before they become woody. Harvest when roots are about the size of a golf ball. Gently pull beets out of the soil by the base of their stem.

Eating: Beets are often added to salads or roasted winter vegetable dishes.

Storing: Beets will store in the refrigerator for several weeks.



How to Save Beet Seeds

*The distance required to isolate beets might seem daunting, but because a variety only needs to be isolated from other varieties in flower, and most *Beta vulgaris* plants are harvested for eating before they enter their reproductive phase, the long isolation distance is less prohibitive than it may appear. This crop is a biennial, meaning that it will not set seed until the second year of growth. At seed maturity, plants of this species take up a fair amount of garden real estate.*

Life Cycle: Biennial

Recommended Isolation Distance: Separate varieties by 800 feet to 1 mile.

Recommended Population Sizes: To ensure viable seeds, save seeds from at least 5 plants. When maintaining a variety over many generations, save seeds from 20-50 plants. If you're saving seeds for genetic preservation of a rare variety, save seeds from 80 plants or more.

Assessing Seed Maturity: Seeds at the base of the flower stalks ripen first, and seed maturation continues up the stalks. Seeds change from green to a tannish-brown color as they mature.

Harvesting: Once seeds start ripening, there will almost always be a mixture of mature and immature seeds on plants. Harvesting when approximately two-thirds of the seeds are brown is recommended. Depending on the scale of seed collection, individual seed stalks can be cut or entire plants can be pulled from the garden and moved to a place where they can continue drying. Depending on the percentage of ripe seeds at harvest, 7 to 14 days should be a sufficient drying period.

Cleaning and Processing: The seed stalks can be threshed using one of several methods. Small lots and cut branches can be processed by running a gloved hand along the length of the stalk with a container placed underneath to catch dislodged seeds; stalks should be discarded once they are stripped of seeds. Larger lots and whole plants can be placed in large tubs or on tarps and tread upon. Threshed seed stalks should be discarded, and the seed lot should then be screened and winnowed.

Storage and Viability: When stored under cool, dry conditions, beet seeds can be expected to remain viable for five years.