

Beetroot

The humble beetroot isn't one of those trendy new superfoods but is packed full of things that are good for your physical health and mental well-being. Compared to most other roots and tubers, it is particularly high in protein and iron. It is a good source of naturally occurring folic acid, and also contains nitrates, betaine, magnesium and other antioxidants. Betanin, the pigment which gives beetroot its colour, is a potent antioxidant.



Along with another class of antioxidants called polyphenols, these are getting more attention in the scientific community – for example, antioxidants are said to reduce the oxidation of bad cholesterol, protect the artery walls and guard against heart disease and stroke. For beetroot in particular, recent health research has come up with lots of benefits. It is said to be a great purifier, to help lower blood pressure, prevent cancer and slow the onset of dementia. But only red beets have the cancer-fighting compound betacyanin.

Beetroot in a healthy diet

Diets using beetroot recipes can also help you lose pounds and maintain a healthy weight, because beetroot

- contains almost no fat and despite a high sugar content, it is low in calories
- is a good source of dietary fibre, half soluble and half insoluble, so you feel full on fewer calories
- its high magnesium level supports optimal nerve and muscle functioning, helping to increase your existing level of exercise and stamina, and boost physical performance generally.

Cooking beetroot

To cook whole, wash but don't peel, then cut the stalks to 2.5cm and leave the root at the bottom; if either are trimmed too much, the beetroot's colour will bleed – and deep red beets will stain! The colour comes from a pigment called betanin which is often extracted to create natural food colouring and dyes. If your hands do become stained during preparation and cooking beetroot, rub some lemon juice over them to help remove the colour.

Boiling: Place the washed, trimmed beetroot in a large saucepan and cover with 2 cm of water. Bring to the boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium-low, cover and simmer until just tender, about 30 to 60 minutes depending on size. Test with a skewer. To serve just as a vegetable accompaniment, just boil the beetroots for a few minutes, drain and serve with olive oil or butter.

Baking: Place the washed, trimmed beetroot in foil or in a little water in a lidded casserole dish. Bake in a low oven for about 2-3 hours, or medium to high (200 C, Gas 6) for about half an hour.

Beetroot and Apple Chutney

Preparation and cooking: 2-2 ½ hours

Ingredients

1.35 kg beetroot	680 g apples	2 large onions
225 g demerara or soft brown sugar	½ teaspoon ground ginger	½ teaspoon salt
570 ml vinegar	Juice of 1 lemon	

Method

1. Boil or bake the beetroot (see above for methods), cool and remove skin.
2. Peel, core and cut the apples up roughly. Peel and cut the onions up roughly.
3. Put the cooked beetroot, cut apples and onions through a mincer, or whiz them in a blender – add some of the vinegar if it isn't liquid enough to break down the apples and onions easily.
4. Transfer the blended ingredients to a large pan, add the sugar, vinegar, lemon, ginger and salt. Boil until soft and spooning/chutney consistency, stirring frequently.
5. Pour into sterilised jars with vinegar-proof lids

