



Preserving Beets

Red beets can safely be pressure canned, frozen, or acidified with vinegar and pickled. There are even directions for beet relishes and for drying beets.

 ARTICLES | UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 21, 2021



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Beets are root vegetables that showcase some of Mother Nature's most beautiful colors, including red, white, gold, and even striped like peppermint candies. Beets get their vibrant colors from Betalain, which are pigments that act as antioxidants with anti-inflammatory properties.

Beets should be stored unwashed, with 2 inches of their stem attached to

avoid color bleed, and can remain refrigerated in a plastic bag for up to 2 weeks. However, for canning or freezing, preserve the beets as soon after harvest as possible.

Preparing the Beets for Preservation

Regardless of the preservation method, the beets are cooked until tender or until soft enough to remove their skins. To prepare the beets, trim off beet tops, leaving 1 inch of stem and roots to prevent bleeding of color. Wash, sort for size, place similar sizes together and cover with boiling water, and cook until tender (about 25

to 30 minutes). Drain and discard liquid. Do not use the cooking liquid for canning; it is dirty. Cool the beets in cold water until cool enough to handle. Trim off roots and stems and slip off skins. Follow recipe directions for slicing, dicing, chunking, or using whole.

Canning Beets

- Fresh beets are a low-acid food and must be processed in a pressure canner to ensure safety from *Clostridium botulinum*.
- Beet varieties commonly chosen for pressure canning are: Detroit Dark Red, Cylindra, Ruby Queen, Red Ace, Red Cloud, and Golden.
- Selected beets should have diameters of less than 2 inches. So, large beets should be cut into ½-inch cubes or slices.
- The size of the cut beet pieces affects the processing time; therefore, if you use whole beets and the recipe calls for diced beets, you may be under processing the product.
- The beets should be packed into hot jars with 1-inch headspace. Add canning or pickling salt (½ teaspoon for pints and 1 teaspoon for quarts) if desired.
- Process pints for 30 minutes and quarts for 35 minutes at 10 pounds pressure in a weighted gauge canner or 11 pounds pressure in a dial gauge canner. [Make adjustments for your altitude as needed.](#)
- Although there are commercial applications for canning beets in a thickened sauce such as Harvard beets, it is not safe to try to replicate such recipes in home food preservation. Never add a thickener to canned beets because it will interfere with heat transfer into the food during processing. Thicken and season plain canned beets when you are ready to serve them.
- Sometimes canned red beets turn pale in color when pressure canned. According to Luke LaBorde, professor of food science at Penn State University, the red pigments in beets are sensitive to high temperatures and can transform into a colorless compound during canning. Some varieties of beets are more sensitive to heat than others. The reaction is reversible, and often the color of the canned product will return to a darker red after a few days of storage at room temperature.

Pickled Beets

- In addition to the beet types commonly used in pressure canning, pickling allows for the Chioggia and Albino varieties to also be used.
- Acidifying beets prior to canning via a pickling process enables them to be preserved in a boiling water bath canner or atmospheric steam canner.

- Make sure that there is adequate vinegar in your pickled beet recipe. Scientifically research-tested recipes use more than ½ cup vinegar per pint jar.
- Processing time is longer than for most pickles. Recommended processing time for pickled beets is 30 minutes in boiling water or atmospheric steam canning. Adjust processing time and make adjustments for your altitude as needed.
- Do not pour the hot beets and pickling solution into the jar and seal them without processing in a boiling water or atmospheric steam canner.
- Remember to allow ½-inch headspace.
- When you open a jar of pickled beets, the pickle liquid can be used to make red beet eggs.
- Avoid substituting artificial sweeteners in a pickled beet recipe unless you are using a research-based recipe. Sugar plays a role in the texture and the processing time for pickles. The [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#) has a research-tested recipe for making pickled beets with no sugar added.

Freezing Beets

- If preservation via freezing is preferred, the Albino and Early Wonder varieties work well.
- Prepare the beets by cooking them with ½ inch of their stem intact to minimize color bleed; then, cool them in cold water and remove the stems, taproot, and skin. Next, cut the beets into slices or cubes, package them into freezer bags or containers with a ½-inch headspace, and freeze.
- Tray-packed beets remain loose, allowing you to pour the desired amount from the container. To tray pack, spread beets in a single layer on shallow trays or pans. Place in the freezer only long enough to freeze firm. Check often after the first hour to avoid loss of moisture. When beets are firmly frozen, package, leaving no headspace, and seal.
- Note that the quality and texture of frozen beets differs from that of canned beets. The high moisture content allows for cell breakdown when frozen. You may want to try freezing a few first to see if you find the texture of the frozen beets acceptable.

Drying Beets

- Beets dehydrate relatively easily.
- Cook as normal; cool; peel; cut into shoestring strips ⅛ inch thick; then dry for 10-12 hours in a dehydrator (or twice as long if drying in an oven).
- The dried strips will be dark red and brittle.

- Fifteen pounds of fresh beets will yield roughly 1.5 pounds—or up to 5 pints—of dried beets.
- Dried beets can be used in soups or reconstituted as a vegetable.

References:

Zepp, M., Hirneisen, A., LaBorde, L. (2021, June 30). *Let's Preserve: Root Vegetables- Beets, Carrots, Turnips, and Rutabagas* . Penn State Extension.

[National Center for Home Food Preservation](#)