

Don't skip a beet

Not a presidential favorite, but veggie gets health vote

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Behold the lowly red beet.

Beneath its scruffy surface you'll find a wallop of nutrients, the sweetness of a dessert buffet and enough gourmet appeal to satisfy legions of discriminating California foodies.

"Red beets are everywhere in San Diego and the entire West Coast," said food writer Maureen Clancy (www.maureenclancy.com). "Every restaurant has beet salads with blue cheese or feta. Roasted beets are big, too. They have a wonderful, earthy, flavor. Pureed beets can be added to potatoes or risottos, even chocolate cake."

Midwesterners are slightly behind the trend.

"Nope, they haven't totally caught on here yet," said Eileen Haraminac, educator and food and nutrition program director for the Macomb County MSU Cooperative Extension. "They're dirty and hard and people don't know what to do with them. They're also one of my favorite vegetables."

Long-time Chicago resident President Barack Obama had no idea he was brandishing his Midwestern sensibility when he was recently quoted as saying: "I always avoid eating them (beets)."

In Michigan, produce perception is often determined by childhood experience, said Christine Eagle, clinical nutrition manager for Beaumont Hospital Royal Oak.

"It's either: 'My mother made beets when I was a kid, and I hated them,' or 'My mother made beets and I loved them,'" Eagle said.

A whiff of beet interest has been sparked, however, by the growing return to a local food culture, Eagle said.

"Red beets are grown in Michigan, so they're always there for us," said

Yvonne Thigpen, registered dietitian and certified diabetes educator at Mount Clemens Regional Medical Center. "They over-winter well, which is why they were popular in Russia and the Slavic countries, and they're budget-conscious as well."

As greater numbers of Americans and Midwesterners turn to farmers' markets, such as those in Royal Oak, Warren, Mount Clemens and New Baltimore, or purchase memberships in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), they're inspired to try new veggies, Eagle said.

"When you belong to a CSA, you get XYZ vegetables — including beets — in your box each week," she said. "What do you do with them? People are learning: It's fun to find out."

Nutritionally, beets produce.

According to Thigpen, a single serving of red beets provides the daily requirement for manganese (51 percent), a powerful antioxidant and metabolic catalyst; folate (33 percent); vitamin C; iron (10 percent), along with plenty of fiber.

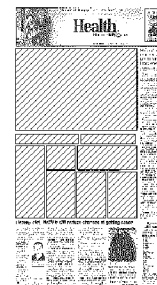
Preparing red beets, as it turns out, is not that difficult.

Toss them whole into a pot of water on your stove-top and boil for 25 minutes. Cool in a strainer and the skins will slip away. Slice and chill. Cut in chunks and serve in salads, or sauté with vinegar, onions and oil, Haraminac said.

Clancy suggests washing gently, coating with olive oil, salt, pepper and fresh chives and placing them in a 375 F oven for 20 to 25 minutes.

"They're good enough to eat just like that, but you can also puree them in a food processor and add to mashed potatoes for sweetness and color," Clancy said.

Beet greens provide a second source of nutrients and flavor. Wash well and



sauté with oil and onions. Unlike spinach or kale, beet greens are not even slightly bitter, Eagle said, and a single serving provides 220 percent of our vitamin A requirement.

For additional inspiration, consider this mouth-watering description from Clancy's blog: "The tart looked like a sheet of hot-pink satin overlaid with off-white lace, and it was blush-inducingly delicious. It brought together the dark, earthy flavor of beets — sweet and rich, with a welcome bitter edge — and the salty tang of feta, binding them in a smooth, eggy custard."

Look for easy gourmet beet recipes from Clancy's collection in the recipe roundup at www.FoodieVlew.com. These include: Beet and Goat Cheese Salad with Pistachios, Balsamic Baked Beets with Red Onions and Hazelnuts, Moroccan Beet Salad, Beets in Orange/Apricot Sauce and Roasted Beet Salad With Horseradish Cream Dressing.



They may not be a favorite of President Barack Obama, but beets are beneficial to your health by providing manganese, folate, vitamins and plenty of fiber.



Beet preparation is not that difficult. Toss them whole into a pot of water on stove-top and boil for 25 minutes. Cool in a strainer and the skins will slip away. Slice and chill. Cut in chunks and serve in salads with mixed greens and walnuts.

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