

What Do Beets Taste Like?

Beets don't exactly have a very good reputation when it comes to their taste, which probably comes from the fact that most people claim they taste like dirt. Such statements do a fairly good job of turning people against the idea of even trying beets, which is unfortunate since they are quite healthy for you.

But is the common sentiment even accurate? Do beets even taste the way people claim they do, or is it a myth propagated by those who have never even tried beets for themselves?

Here, we'll not only talk about what beets really taste like and why, but how you can use this taste to your advantage, the ways you can change that taste, and creative ways to use it in different dishes and recipes, all of which will help you include beets in your day to day diet more frequently.

Do Beets Have a Universal Taste?

The answer to this question is a very solid no. Like nearly all foods, beets taste different depending on how you prepare them, and those preparations can drastically shift flavor into all sorts of directions. Raw beets aren't going to taste the same as cooked beets, or steamed beets, and so on. That's why we can't conclude this article by simply claiming that beets taste one certain way, because the taste can change based on a wide variety of factors. Let's talk about the different ways beets can taste based on how you prepare them.

Raw Beets are the Ones That Taste the Most 'Earthy'

When people claim that beets taste 'like dirt' they are generally referring to raw beets. In fact, beets are one of the few root vegetables that can be eaten raw, and even after being washed, they do have somewhat of an earthy taste to them. This isn't necessarily a bad taste, as it is a bit sweet as well, but it is an acquired one, and it's not a flavor that everyone is going to like.

That said, the earthy taste of raw beets has nothing to do with the fact that it is a root that grows in the dirt, as many people have been led to believe. There are no leftover dirt particles ingrained in the beets making them taste the way they do. Beets taste earthy because of an organic compound that microbes produce in the soil, known as geosmin, which also makes beets smell kind of earthy.

There's nothing dangerous or unnatural about this geosmin, as it is present in plenty of vegetables, and humans are highly sensitive to it for a reason; it is supposed to be pleasant and enjoyable. Some people might not like it, but it's probably because they haven't been eating these types of foods for most of their dietary life.

How to Select the Freshest Beets for the Best Flavor

If you aren't very fond of the idea of earthy tasting food, we'll talk about different ways you can cook beets to change their taste later: for now, we're simply going to share these straightforward and simple tips on how to pick and maintain the freshest beets. After all, regardless of what flavor you ultimately want to get out of them, your beets need to be fresh if you want them to come out appetizing in any way.

#1 Always Pick the Firm Beets, not the Soft and Spongy Ones

As with most vegetables, firm is good and soft is bad. Soft beets can be a sign that the beet itself is already too old, and that it is past its optimal stage for freshness. So if you want your beets to taste as good as they possibly can regardless of how you plan on preparing them, you need to get the freshest ones you can, and those are almost always nice and firm.

#2 Pick Beets That Have Nice, Leafy Green Tops

Very similarly to the aforementioned point on picking firm beets, leafy green tops are good indicators that a beet is fresh, or at least more fresh than some of its competition. While this part in and of itself doesn't do anything to reduce that earthy taste, it is still an important part of making sure whatever flavor you do want to get out of your beets is as appetizing as possible.

#3 Keep them Refrigerated Until You Are Ready to Cook

You've probably figured that these points are all about freshness by now, but we still have to point this out. Beets don't go bad extremely fast or anything, but if you don't plan on cooking with them right away, it is still best to keep them refrigerated until you actually plan on using them. By doing this, you can once again ensure that the beets stay as fresh as possible.

#4 Wash Your Beets Thoroughly Before Peeling and Cooking Them

Perhaps this didn't need to be said since it is fairly obvious, but you should always wash your beets before you peel and cook them. Just because dirt isn't what makes them taste earthy doesn't mean there isn't any dirt on them, or any other type of undesirable particle. It is just prudent to always wash vegetables before you cook them, to stay as safe as possible.

How Can the Earthy Taste be Mitigated if You Don't Like It?

Whether or not geosmin is good for you doesn't change the fact that you just might not like how it tastes: but if you're here reading this, then it is pretty likely that you would like to give beets a shot, maybe for their dietary benefits. There are ways you can lessen that earthy taste if you want, mostly revolving around how you cook them, and we'll cover those many methods below.

#1 Roast Your Beets to Bring out Their Sweet Flavor

Roasting beets is one of the best ways to maximize their sweet flavor, better concentrating it so the focus is more on that sweetness instead of the natural earthy taste. Of course, you can change the flavor even further depending on what you roast the beets with, and roasting them will ultimately result in a more tender, almost potato-like texture. Roasting is one of the best ways to alter the flavor of beets if you don't want to deal with the earthy taste.

#2 Boiling Beets is a Good Way to Subdue the Earthy Flavor

As most people can tell you, boiling a vegetable is a good way to make it taste almost like nothing at all, or to really subdue the primary flavor of a vegetable at the very least. Beets are no exception, and if you would rather just try and get rid of any taste rather than substituting your own, boiling the beets can be an excellent way to do that. Like roasting, boiling will also make the beets a more tender and soft texture, but not to the same extent. Adding salt when you are boiling is a great way to get a bit more kick out of beets.

#3 Steaming is a Viable Cooking Option, but Not the Best for Changing the Flavor

Steaming is the absolute fastest way to cook beets, but if you want to change the flavor from its earthy natural taste, it probably isn't the best choice. Steaming will get the job done fast, but if you don't add anything else to the process it will come out not tasting much different from how it did originally. If you still want to cook them fast while trying to change the flavor, you can add coconut oil or other such substances to try and alter the taste.

#4 Pair Beets With Complementary Flavors to Balance the Bitterness

Perhaps the most important tip for how to mitigate the beet flavor you don't like is to not eat beets by themselves: for one, beets are much like many other vegetables, in that they always seem much more appetizing when they share a plate or recipe with some other ingredients. Admittedly, beets are a little bitter, but that flavor isn't a bad thing when you pair it with some complements, like some sweet or fresh flavors. Making a good combination to make use of the flavor is much easier than trying to drown it out. But if you are determined to do that...

#5 Marinating Your Beets Will go a Long Way to Changing How They Taste

Infusing a food item with a new flavor is essentially the definition of marinating, and beets are a perfectly viable target for marinating if you really want to try and outright replace their natural earthy taste. Garlic, citrus zest, salt, vinegar, or scallion are all great options that possess a nice, sharp kick to them that helps balance out the bitter undertones of natural beets. And of course, there are plenty of other things you could marinate your beets with to change their flavor to something you really like.

Why Bother Trying to Make Beets Tastier at All?

You may be wondering why you should go through the effort to make a beet pleasing to your tastes in the first place: after all, if you don't like something, why not just go find another food item that you do enjoy the taste of? Well, beets are an excellent source of many vitamins and minerals, and it would be a real shame to miss out on all of their benefits.

#1 Beets Have Very Few Calories While Possessing Many Nutrients

Beets are impressive because they offer a wide array of health benefits while forcing a very small calorie count on you. Your average beet only contains about forty-four calories, but comes with almost two grams of protein and two grams of fiber. It also comes with large doses of your recommended daily intake of magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, manganese, iron, Vitamins C and B6, and a whopping twenty percent of your daily Folate requirement.

#2 Beets Have Many Other Blanket Health Benefits

Most scientists these days will tell you that vegetables help with just about everything, from heart disease to mental acuity and even preventing cancer. Well, beets are not exempt from this; in fact, they too are capable of providing many of these benefits. The high fiber content of beets helps lessen hunger pangs, and their low calorie count even helps with weight loss. Beets also help reduce inflammation and improve digestion.

In short, beets have a whole lot of benefits in a very small package, which means it is worth finding ways to include it in your diet, even if you don't like how it tastes. That's why we've been sharing all these other methods you can use to help change, subdue or mitigate the earthy flavor of a beet if you don't like it.

Why does any of this Matter?

If you came to this article because you were wondering what beets taste like, you may be wondering why we said more than just 'earthy and bitter.' That's because, while beets do have a taste like that, it doesn't mean that it is the only way beets can taste. Like nearly all foods, you can alter how a beet tastes by the way you cook it, and by the way it is prepared or paired with other ingredients. What we're trying to share with you is that you shouldn't write off the beet just because you have heard that it tastes like dirt, or even if you have tried a beet before and didn't like it.

After all, beets are an excellent source of nutrition, being a great provider of many vitamins and minerals that our bodies need to survive and grow. Cutting them out of your diet entirely is like cutting away a huge, healthy opportunity. Rather than just ignore the beet entirely, we encourage you to give it a try with different cooking methods, different recipes, and different seasonings, so you can take advantage of its many health benefits in your day to day diet.