

BEET LEAVES



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Beet Leaves: An Introduction

Beet leaves are one of the most popular leafy vegetable grown in India and this crop is mainly grown for its leaves and tubers. It is also known as Indian spinach. Tender succulent leaves along with its tender seed stalks make an ideal leafy vegetable for Indian kitchens. Beet leaves are high in nutrition.

Taxonomy

Beet leaves belong to the family Chenopodiaceae, genus Beta and species *vulgaris*.

Choosing Varieties

Good quality beet leaves are tender and free of bruises and any other forms of damage. A healthy beet crop has quick rejuvenation ability after each harvest. In healthy and good quality crop, seed stalks will appear late, after harvesting season is over.

Climatic Requirements

Beet leaves are best suited for temperate climate and winter seasons. However, beet crop can be grown throughout the year in India. Extreme climatic conditions must be avoided for its growth. During summers, the crop has a tendency to develop seed stalks early and thus limiting the harvests to one or two leaf cuttings only.

Soil Requirements

Beet leaves are suited for all types of soils but clay loam soils are most suitable for its growth.



Growing Practices

Beet crop can be raised many times in a year such as during spring, again at the beginning of rains and for the main winter crop during September to November. In the hills, sowing time is from March to May. Recommended seed rate is about 30 kg per hectare. Sowing is done through broadcasting. Seeds are sown in nursery beds and/or in well-prepared open fields. Recommended spacing is 15 to 20 cm within the rows. Good spacing between plants facilitates weeding and intercultural operations.

Manure Requirements

Plenty of nitrogen is required by the plant for leaf production. This nitrogen can be supplied to the plant through organic manures such as farm yard manures and compost. A basal dressing of 35 to 40 tones of farmyard manure may be incorporated in the top soil at the time of field preparation to enhance soil fertility. A top-dressing of about 20 kg of nitrogen after every harvest gives quick leaf production.

Harvesting and Yield

Harvesting is done by hand picking if the crop is small. For a large crop, harvest can be done by cutting the leaves from the base when the leaves are 15 to 30 cm long. Major harvesting considerations are tenderness and succulence of the leaves.



Several harvests, up to four cuttings are possible during the summer months. Highest yield that can be obtained is about 8 –10 tons of green leaves per hectare.

Disease Management

Beet leaves are susceptible to a number of fungal diseases. These are: damping-off, cercospora leaf spot, mildew and rust.

Damping-off: Damping-off attacks nursery plants, i.e. the young seedlings immediately after the emergence. This disease can be controlled by treating the seeds with a recommended fungicide before sowing.

Cercospora leaf spot: This disease produces brown, dead spots on the leaves and can be controlled by spraying any copper fungicides such as Bordeaux mixture.

Mildew and rust are not so common and can be partially checked by dusting sulphur and some copper fungicide.

Insect Pest Management

Like other leafy vegetables, beet plants are also susceptible to common insects such as aphids, bugs, caterpillars and beetles. These insects can be controlled by hand picking or by spraying any recommended organic insecticides such as pyrethrums. As leaves are continuously harvested and used for fresh consumption, chemical insecticides should be avoided. Spraying with nicotine sulphate or dusting with 0.2 to 0.3 % pyrethrum is best advised.





Beet Greens

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