



Plants For A Future

*Edible, medicinal and useful plants
for a healthier world*

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Database Name:

Beta vulgaris cicla - (L.)W.D.J.Koch.

Keyword:

Spinach Beet

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Author	(L.)W.D.J.Koch.	Botanical references	200
Family	Chenopodiaceae	Genus	Beta
Synonyms	<i>Beta cicla</i> - (L.)L.		
Known Hazards	None known		
Range	A cultivated form of <i>B. vulgaris maritima</i> that is grown for its edible leaves.		
Habitat	Not known in a truly wild situation.		
Edibility Rating	 4 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 2 (1-5)

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Physical Characteristics

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Biennial growing to 0.9m.

It is hardy to zone 5 and is not frost tender. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Wind.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils and requires well-drained soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils and can grow in very alkaline and saline soils. It cannot grow in the shade. It requires moist soil.

Habitats

Cultivated Beds;

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Edible Parts: [Leaves](#); [Stem](#).

Leaves and leaf stems - raw or cooked like spinach[2, 16, 27, 33]. A very good spinach substitute, the leaves are large and easily harvested, yields are high[K]. Some people dislike the raw leaves since they can leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth[K]. Flowering stem - cooked. A broccoli substitute[K].

Medicinal Uses

Although little used in modern herbalism, beet has a long history of folk use, especially in the treatment of tumours[269]. A decoction prepared from the seed has been used as a remedy for tumours of the intestines. The seed, boiled in water, is said to cure genital tumours[269]. The juice or other parts of the plant is said to help in the treatment of tumours, leukaemia and other forms of cancer such as cancer of the breast, oesophagus, glands, head, intestines, leg, lip, lung, prostate, rectum, spleen, stomach, and uterus[269]. Some figure that betacyanin and anthocyanin are important in the exchange of substances of cancer cells; others note two main components of the amines, choline and its oxidation product betaine, whose absence produces tumours in mice[269]. The juice has been applied to ulcers [269]. A decoction is used as a purgative by those who suffer from haemorrhoids in South Africa[269]. Leaves and roots used as an emmenagogue[269]. Plant effective in the treatment of feline ascariasis[269]. In the old days, beet juice was recommended as a remedy for anaemia and yellow jaundice, and, put into the nostrils to purge the head, clear ringing ears, and alleviate toothache[269]. Beet juice in vinegar was said to rid the scalp of dandruff as scurf, and was recommended to prevent falling hair[269]. Juice of the white beet was said to clear obstructions of the liver and spleen[269]. Culpepper (1653) recommended it for treating headache and vertigo as well as all affections of the brain[269].

Other Uses

None known

Cultivation details

A very easily grown plant, it succeeds in sun or light shade in moist soils but prefers a rich well-drained light neutral to alkaline soil[33, 37]. Beets grow well in a variety of soils, growing best in a deep, friable well-drained soil abundant with organic matter, but doing poorly on clay. They prefer an open position and a light well-drained soil[52]. The optimum pH is 6.0 - 6.8, but neutral and alkaline soils are tolerated in some areas. Some salinity may be tolerated after the seedling stage. Beets are notable for their tolerance to manganese toxicity[269]. Beet is reported to tolerate an annual precipitation of 23 to 315cm, an average annual temperature range of 5.0 to 26.6°C and a pH of 4.2 to 8.2[269]. Plants are tolerant of saline soils and respond positively if salt is added to non-saline soils at a rate of about

30g per square metre[264]. Spinach beet is often cultivated by gardeners for its edible leaves[16], it does not make a very good commercial crop since the leaves quickly droop after being harvested and so do not stand the journey to market. This plant is a good hot weather substitute for spinach[183]. The leaves are available all year round from successional sowings if the winters are not too severe[K]. In severe winters it is possible to dig up some plants and move them to a protected area such as a greenhouse in order to produce fresh leaves[1]. Plants usually self-sow freely if they are well-sited and the ground is disturbed by hoeing etc[K]. A good companion for dwarf beans, onions and kohlrabi[18], though the growth of spinach beet is inhibited by runner beans, charlock and field mustard[18].

Propagation

Seed - sow in situ in early April for the summer crop and again in early July to August for the winter and spring crop. It is also possible to obtain an earlier crop by sowing the seed in a tray in a greenhouse in March and planting out in April/May[264].

Links

This plant is also mentioned in the following PFAF articles: [Winter Salads](#).

References

[K] **Ken Fern**

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon**. *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement*. 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[2] **Hedrick. U. P.** *Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World*. Dover Publications 1972 ISBN 0-486-20459-6

Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[16] **Simons**. *New Vegetable Growers Handbook*. Penguin 1977 ISBN 0-14-046-050-0

A good guide to growing vegetables in temperate areas, not entirely organic.

[18] **Philbrick H. and Gregg R. B.** *Companion Plants*. Watkins 1979
Details of beneficial and antagonistic relationships between neighbouring plants.

[27] **Vilmorin. A.** *The Vegetable Garden*. Ten Speed Press 0 ISBN 0-89815-041-8

A reprint of a nineteenth century classic, giving details of vegetable

varieties. Not really that informative though.

[33] **Organ. J.** *Rare Vegetables for Garden and Table*. Faber 1960
Unusual vegetables that can be grown outdoors in Britain. A good guide.

[37] **Thompson. B.** *The Gardener's Assistant*. Blackie and Son. 1878
Excellent general but extensive guide to gardening practices in the 19th century. A very good section on fruits and vegetables with many little known species.

[52] **Larkcom. J.** *Salads all the Year Round*. Hamlyn 1980
A good and comprehensive guide to temperate salad plants, with full organic details of cultivation.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants*. Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9
Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening*. 1992. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5
Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[264] **Phillips. R. & Rix. M.** *Vegetables* Macmillan Reference Books, London. 1995 ISBN 0 333 62640 0
Excellent and easily read book with good information and an excellent collection of photos of vegetables from around the world, including many unusual species.

[269] **Duke. J.** *Handbook of Energy Crops* - 1983
Published only on the Internet, excellent information on a wide range of plants.

Readers Comments

Winter Salads

JAMES HENDERSON Wed Jan 18 2006

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT BORRAGE? APART FROM ITS STARFLOWER OIL CONTENT AND CUCUMBER FLAVOUR, WHAT MINERALS & VITAMINS DOES IT CONTAIN. DOES IT GROW IN THE WILD?

Beta vulgaris cicla

Louise Wisniewski Thu Feb 15 2007

Very good! PLEASE, WHERE CAN I GET SEED OF WILD BETA

VULGARIS (SEA BEET) FROM? IT IS A MOST WONDERFUL EDIBLE PLANT, FAR SUPERIOR TO SPINACH OR CHARD! I WOULD LOVE TO GROW IT! HAVE ONLY EATEN THE WILD LEAVES, LIGHTLY STEAMED, YUMMY! Louise Wisniewski

Beta vulgaris cicla

Ken Fern, Plants for a Future Sun Feb 18 2007

The only seed supplier I know of for Beta vulgaris maritima is B & T World Seeds. Thier web address is <http://www.b-and-t-world-seeds.com/>

Add a comment/link:

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Note: please don't expect a quick reply to comments/questions posted here? We don't have the resources to answer questions ourselves. You can ask questions on our [mailing list](#).

Subject: Beta vulgaris cicla

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