

THE BENEFITS OF BEETROOT

Highly nutritious beetroot is well worth growing.

Naturopath **MERYN WAKELIN** shines the light on this underrated root crop.

Beetroot is a power food still rather overlooked in New Zealand cuisine. Pickled beetroot from a can (or if you're lucky, home preserved) is a quick and easy side dish for a lazy summer meal or a classic Kiwi burger. But there are so many more ways we can enjoy this easily grown root vegetable.

Here are some of the reasons why beetroot should be more frequently served at the table – whether raw, roasted, steamed, pickled or juiced...

Raw energy

One serving (one cup) of raw or cooked beetroot contains approximately 250 kilojoules. Research has shown it can boost your energy, fight cancer, lower blood pressure, enhance immunity and reduce pain. A very recent piece of research indicated that a 70ml serving of beetroot juice can lower blood pressure by 2%. However it sits quite high on the glycaemic index (i.e. these sugars are absorbed quickly) so if you have any trouble metabolising

sugars be sure to eat small portions of the whole root rather than just the juice. Combine it in a meal with green leafy veges (e.g. grated raw in a salad) and a serving of high quality protein, to lower the glycaemic load.

Nutrient rich

Any vegetable with such a deep, rich red colour has got to be loaded with nutrients, and of course beetroot is. Particularly vitamin B complex and folate, vitamin C and beta-carotene and minerals magnesium, manganese, potassium, calcium, zinc, iron and boron. If cooking beetroot, to preserve nutrients as much as possible it is ideal to minimise the cooking time. Peel and trim raw beetroot (with rubber gloves to prevent stained hands) then chop into a few pieces so as to be cooked to your satisfaction within 15 minutes.



Natural detox

Beetroot is very rich in anti-oxidants and in fact is excellent for assisting your liver to break down toxins, so it's always good to include in a detox juice.

Leaves too

Beetroot greens rate at the top of the list of most beneficial greens we can eat. Most nutritious raw (throw them in a green smoothie or add baby beet leaves to a salad), they can also be lightly cooked – like silverbeet. So they really are a great all-season crop.

Libido builder

The fact that beets are high in Boron helps answer the question of why the ancient Romans considered Beetroot to be an aphrodisiac – Boron is an essential building block of our sex hormones!

Best ever chocolate cake

Last but definitely not least I would also like to tell you the mighty beetroot can turn a perfectly lovely chocolate cake into an absolutely sublime experience! 🍷

Meryn Wakelin is a naturopath and nutrition consultant. www.healnaturally.co.nz



MERYN'S BEETROOT AND CHOCOLATE CAKE (GLUTEN FREE)

250 grams fresh beetroot
200 grams dark chocolate (70%+)
¼ cup hot espresso
150 grams butter
1 ½ cups ground almonds
1 teaspoon baking powder
3 tablespoons good quality cocoa powder or ultimately raw cacao powder
5 eggs
¾ cup raw sugar

- ➔ Heat the oven to 175 degrees C.
- ➔ Lightly butter a 20cm springform cake tin and line the base with baking paper.
- ➔ Trim, peel and chop beetroot into 3 cm wedges and cook in boiling unsalted water until they are tender (about 10 minutes). Drain and cool under cold for a few minutes then process in a food processor until a coarse purée.
- ➔ Warm the chocolate and butter together in a bowl placed over simmering water. When the chocolate/butter looks almost melted, remove from heat and pour the hot espresso over it and stir briefly to just combine and finish melting.
- ➔ In a large bowl mix ground almonds, baking powder and cocoa.
- ➔ Separate the eggs. Beat the yolks together with the sugar until creamy then mix in the cooled melted chocolate mix and then the beetroot.
- ➔ Whisk the egg whites until stiff. Using a large metal spoon or rubber spatula, fold the beaten egg whites and sugar into the chocolate mixture. Work in a deep, figure-eight movement but take care not to over-mix.
- ➔ Lastly, fold in the ground almond and cocoa mix.
- ➔ Transfer to the prepared cake tin and place in the oven, decreasing the heat immediately to 160 degrees C. Bake for 40 minutes. The rim of the cake will feel spongy, the inner part should still wobble a little when gently shaken. Test with a cake tester - if it is still too goeey in the center, continue baking just until moist crumbs cling to the tester.
- ➔ Set the cake aside to cool (it will sink a bit in the centre), loosening it around the edges with a knife after half an hour or so. It is not a good idea to remove the cake from its pan until it is completely cold. Serve with crème fraîche or whipped cream. Alternatively another luxurious option is to smother the cake with chocolate avocado "icing".

CHOCOLATE AND AVOCADO "ICING"

2 ripe avocados
½ cup dark chocolate, melted
2 tablespoons coconut oil, melted
2 tablespoons raw cacao powder (or cocoa)
⅓ cup runny honey
¼ tsp vanilla essence

- ➔ Melt the coconut oil and dark chocolate in a bowl over simmering water until its melted but not heated. Spoon the flesh out of the avocado into a blender along with all the other ingredients and blitz until super smooth. Then scrape it all out into a bowl and chill in a fridge for the minimum of half an hour. "Ice" the cake and chill until ready to serve.