

# A Pair of Beet Recipes

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*Getting started: buy 2 bunches of beets.*

In most winter supermarkets, you'll now be able to find whole beets. This means the root and leafy stems come attached in one large bundle. Bunches tend to have three to four roots tied together, and for these recipes you'll use two complete bunches.

Once you've purchased your beets, you'll need to do some work relatively quickly. The tender leaves of beet greens, unlike other leafy vegetables, will bruise and spoil quickly. Right when you get home (or at the latest in 24 hours), take a sharp knife and cut off the greens about ¼ inch from the top of the beet root. The roots will keep for a long time in cold storage and still taste pretty great, but the greens need your attention. So let's start there.

## Beet Greens with Garlic

### 1) *Prep the greens*

Once you've separated the stems from the root, wash the leafy part in cold water to get rid of any dirt or sand that might remain. Cut the stringy stem from the leaf part (these cook at different rates, so you'll want them separated). Stack up the stems apart from the leaves and cut the stems into about 2 inch sections. Put these aside. Stack up the leaves in piles, slicing them perpendicular to the veins in 1 ½ inch strips. Put these aside as well, separate from the stems.

### 2) *Chop 2-4 cloves of garlic, and have the rest of the ingredients ready*

Salt to taste  
¼ c olive oil<sup>1</sup>

If you're feeling spicy, red chili flakes.

If you're feeling meaty, about 2 ounces of some form of fatty pork (bacon, pancetta, salt pork, or uncured belly meat)

### 3) *Cook the greens*

In a wide saucepan, heat up the olive oil. If using pork, start by rendering this. Add in the garlic on medium high heat, and when it turns golden yellow, add in the chopped beet stems and red pepper, if using. Stir a few times, sprinkle lightly with salt, and reduce the heat to medium, covering the pan to steam the stems. Stir occasionally and cook for about 5 minutes, until the stems begin to get tender. Add in the leaves and stir well to make sure the hot oil covers all of the new greens you've added. Cover again to continue steaming, stirring every few minutes. If the pan looks dry, add in a little water to keep the greens from scorching.

### 4) *Serve*

I like to eat these for dinner, lunch, or breakfast with a fried egg and some crusty bread. They are also delicious over polenta, grits, or alongside a roasted meat. This makes enough for 2 dinner-sized portions plus a lunch or two.

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<sup>1</sup> If you are using pork belly, reduce the olive oil to 3 T, and render the fat from the diced pork product by cooking it over a medium low heat until it browns and the liquefied fat is released.

## Red Velvet Beet Cake<sup>2</sup>

### 1) *Prep the beets*

At your leisure, cook the beet roots. There are lots of ways to do this; choose your own. One that I like is to wrap them in a foil packet (or put in a pan covered with foil) and steam with a little bit of water in the pan in a 375 degree oven until they are soft, or the beets fall quickly off of a fork when you stab them. Let the beets cool until room temperature, and you might want to even refrigerate them. They'll keep for several days in the fridge until you're ready to bake.

### 2) *Melt warm ingredients*

Heat  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup butter and 4 oz. chocolate in a small saucepan over low heat. Let cool slightly and then combine into the beet puree to cool down further.

### 3) *Sift dry ingredients together*

- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  c cake flour
- $\frac{1}{8}$  t salt
- 1 t baking soda

### 4) *Make the batter*

Cream together in a mixer

- $\frac{1}{4}$  c butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$  c sugar

Add in one at a time, to maintain the air and volume you've built

- 2 eggs
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  t vanilla

Add in the beet and chocolate mixture when it's at room temperature. Add in the flour last, mixing just to combine. Finish the batter by folding in

- $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  c chocolate chips

### 5) *Bake, in a preheated 375 degree oven, for 50-60 minutes*

The batter should fit in one 9 x 4 large bread loaf pan with some left over for a small loaf too. Butter both pans and dust with flour to help the cake from sticking. Fill the pans about  $\frac{2}{3}$  full of batter, leaving extra room for the cake to rise up the side of the pan as it bakes.

Because this batter has a great deal of moisture from the beets, it is fairly forgiving about baking times. Here are two signs that the cake has cooked all the way through: put in a toothpick or sharp knife in the middle, and if it comes out clean without batter stuck to it, it's done. Secondly, the edges of the cake should start to separate from the pan, pulling away a little bit. When both of those things happen, the cake is ready to pull out of the oven.

### 6) *Cool and serve*

When the pan has cooled a little but is still warm to the touch, tap the loaf out of the pan and let rest on a rack, so that some of the steam comes off of it. Slice and serve, with whipped cream, your favorite cream cheese icing, or sweetened mascarpone (double-rich Italian style cream cheese).

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<sup>2</sup> The dark reddish color of this cake definitely reminds me of red velvet cake, and Wikipedia dubiously assures me old recipes did indeed use beets as a sweetener. I'll believe that legend for now, and leave the historical research for later.