

Roasted beets can brighten up any holiday table

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Beets are the perfect addition to bountiful fall feasts. They are satisfying without being heavy, and their rich ruby and golden tones add visual interest to any seasonal color scheme.

Plus, beets are incredibly flexible on temperature - serve them warm, room temperature or chilled - which is a huge bonus when planning food for holiday entertaining. Having a few dishes that you can make ahead can be a stress-saver when you are hosting a holiday meal.

Beets are more than just their sweet earthy flavor. They also boast ample antioxidants, fiber, folate, manganese, vitamin C, iron and pack almost as much potassium as bananas. Also, beets are what I like to call a two-for-one veggie. Buy the beets and get the beet greens (full of vitamin A) for free (rinse, chop and saute as you would chard).

Obviously, beets stain. Perhaps easiest (meaning the least beet-staining) method for cooking them is roasting them with the skin-on and wrapped in foil. Once the beets cook and cool a bit, you use a paper towel to rub away the skins (they slide off easily). The resulting roasted, peeled beets can be sliced, cubed or cut into wedges and served plain or used in any recipe calling for cooked beets.

If you roast beets until very tender, they can be blended into a dip (just add Greek yogurt, garlic and dill). You also can peel and cube the beets before roasting, but be prepared for stained fingers if you don't use gloves - washing your hands with lemon juice, baking soda or coarse salt will help to remove beet stains from skin.

Beets can be used raw for juicing, or try grating them raw for salads. Toss with grated carrots and a dab of mayo and vinaigrette for a bright coleslaw.

My holiday beet recipe uses the foil-roasting method, but to save time (if not money), you could use pre-cooked beets you'll find in the refrigerated section of the produce aisle.

ROASTED BEETS WITH ORANGE VINAIGRETTE, PECANS AND GOAT CHEESE

Start to finish: 1 hour (20 minutes active) Servings: 8

2 bunches of medium beets, trimmed of stems
1/2 cup olive oil, divided
Salt and ground black pepper
4 scallions, light and dark green parts, chopped
Zest and juice of 2 small oranges
2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
1/2 cup toasted pecans, chopped
1/2 cup soft goat cheese crumbles



Heat the oven to 400 F. Rub the beets with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, then sprinkle with salt and pepper. Wrap the beets in a double layer of foil, then set them on a baking sheet. Roast until just tender, about 45 minutes (larger, older beets could take longer). Set aside to cool until easily handled.

Using paper towels, gently rub off and discard the skins of the beets. Cut the beets into 1 1/2-inch cubes. Set aside.

In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining olive oil, scallions, orange zest and juice, and the thyme. Season with salt and pepper. Toss the beets with the vinaigrette, then sprinkle with pecans and goat cheese. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Nutrition information per serving: 260 calories; 200 calories from fat (77 percent of total calories); 22 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 5 mg cholesterol; 13 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 8 g sugar; 4 g protein; 230 mg sodium.