beets Beta vulgaris

Varieties: The candy-striped Chioggia variety originates from the eponymous Italian town and was likely brought to the United States in the 1800s by Italian immigrants. Beets have a high content of geosmin, which gives them their earthy taste.

Harvest: Beets will become woody and tough in warm weather, so harvest spring-planted beets before temperatures start to rise. Depending upon the variety, harvest beets when they are between 1 and 4 inches in diameter.

Nutrition: Beets owe their bright red color to betacyanin, which also acts as a potent cancer fighter. Beet greens are loaded with folate for heart health along with carotenoids known to protect eyesight. Raw or steamed beet greens are high in Vitamin A, calcium and phosphorus.

In history: The beet that we know today is a form of the beet chosen for its edible roots centuries ago. The vegetable was essential to both ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, in Greek times beet roots were long and sweet—so sweet that in 300 BCE the philosopher Theophrastus reported them sweet enough to eat raw. Today, standard red table beets are about 3% sugar, whereas sugar beets, the variety selected for sugar production, contain up to 20% sucrose.

fennel Foeniculum vulgare

Health: One cup of raw, sliced fennel supplies almost 20% of the Daily Value for Vitamin C and over 10% of fiber needs for only 25 calories.

In the garden: While mature fennel can withstand light frosts, this plant thrives in a temperate or sub-tropical climate where it can enjoy a sunny, warm position in moisture-retentive soil. Two forms of fennel are commonly grown: one for the seed and young leaves used as herbs, and the other for its flavorful base which is eaten as a vegetable.

Did you know? The chemical that gives fennel its distinctive aroma is called anethole. It is one of a group of phenolic compounds that is thirteen times sweeter than table sugar, and is the same chemical that flavors anise seeds and star anise.

Ancient Greeks knew fennel by the name "marathon" because it grew in the field where the storied Battle of Marathon occurred between the Greeks and the Persians.

For more information about this garden, visit our website: goodlifegarden.ucdavis.edu