

Common Name: **Beet**

Genus: *Beta*

Species: *vulgaris*

Family: *Chenopodiaceae*

AKA: Spinach Beet, Sea Beet, Garden Beet, White Beet, Red Roman Beet



## Historical Uses:

### Medical:

“The red beet being under Saturn, and the white beet under Jupiter; therefore take the virtues of them apart, each by itself. (1)

The white beet doth loosen the belly and is of a cleansing digesting quality, and provoketh urine: the juice of it openeth obstructions, both of the liver and spleen, and is good for the head-ache, the swimings therein, and turnings of the brain. It is good against all venomous creatures; and applied to the temples, stayeth inflammations of the eye.

The red beet is good to stay the bloody flux, women’s courses, and the whites, and to help the yellow jaundice. The juice of the root put in the nostrils, purgeth the head, helpeth the noice in the ears, and the tooth-ach; the juice snuffed up the nose helps stinking breath, if the cause lieth in the nose.”(2)

“Beta siluatica is of two sortes, of which ye black doth more binde the belly, being sod with Lens, and most of all the roote, but the white is good for the belly. They both of them being put into the Nostrill with Hony doth purge the head and doth help paines of the eares.” (3)

“Stopped earaches, cleaned sinuses, removed scales, scurf, chilblains, skin eruptions, and pustules, cured alopecia, skin ulcers and erysipelas, promoted digestion, and treated burns.”(4)

**Culinary:** “The great and beautiful beet last described may be used in winter for a salad herbe, with vinegar, oyle, and salt, and is not only pleasant to the taste, but also delightful to the eye. The greater red or Roman Beet, boyled and eaten with oyle, vinegar, and pepper, is a most excellent and delicate salad: but what might be made of the red and beautiful root (which is preferred before the leaves, as well in beauty as in goodness. The white beet, being eaten when it is boyled, it quickly descendeth, looseth the belly, and



Fuch’s red beet

provoketh to the stoole, especially being taken with broth wherein it is sodden: it nourisheth little or nothing, and is not so wholesome as lettuce.”(5)

**Folklore/Astrology:** “The white beet are in moisture and heate temperate, but the other kindes are drie, the white beet is a cold and moist pot-herbe.” (6) “It is associated with the lungs in the Doctrine of Signatures. Under Saturn, it was said to restore the sense of smell. It is cold and moist in nature.”(7) “It was so appreciated by the ancients, that it was recorded that it was offered on silver to Apollo in his temple at Delphi.”(8)

**Other:** “It is believed to have come from the Sea Beet, Beta Maritima, and to have been improved by cultivation. Known as early as 300 B.C.”(9)

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### Contemporary Uses:

**Parts Used:** Leaves and roots

**Medicinal:** “Internally for diarrhea and excessive menstruation. Externally for ulcerated mouth and throat, vaginal discharge, wounds, and nosebleeds.” (10)

**Culinary:** Roots cooked and used as a vegetable, leaves are eaten cooked or fresh as a salad. The roots have been made into wine and ale.(11)

**Economic:** Certain varieties of beet such as Mangel Wurzel are used as animal fodder and have been raised and processed to recover the natural sugars.

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**Area of Origin:** Southern Europe

**Physical description:** Tall, bushy annual with oblong to lanceolate, purple-green leaves.

**Plant type:** Annual

**Form:** Upright

**Height:** To 2 ft.

**Flower color:** Crimson

**Flowering period:** Summer

**Soil type/requirements:** Rich, well-drained soil.

**Hardiness zone:** USDA half hardy

**Sun requirements:** Sun

**Propagation:** By seed sown in spring at 20 degrees C.

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Fuch's white beet

## **Sources**

1. Culpeper makes a distinction between white and red beets. The white is of a larger size with the leaves being green. The red beet has red stalks and leaves and according to Culpeper “The root is red, spongy, and not be eaten.” None of the illustrations of the different kinds of beets in Gerard show what we typically regard as a beet shape, the round bulbous root. It appears that the leaves were the portion of the plant most often eaten.
2. Culpeper, pg. 20-21
3. Dioscorides, Book 2, 149.
4. Anderson, pg. 51
5. Gerard, pg. 319
6. Ibid.
7. Anderson, pg. 51
8. Grieve, pg. 93-94
9. Anderson, pg. 51
10. Bown, pg. 117
11. Grieve, pg. 9

## **Illustrations/Images:**

1. Fuch’s Herbal            1543
2. Fuch’s Herbal            1543