

Going to bat for beets with White House foe

By Maria Cote Special to The Denver Post

A letter from seed growers, horticulturists and foodies would read something like this:

Dear President Obama:

For a man so in touch with his roots, you are seriously out of touch with one lovely root. We're hoping you don't give the beautiful beet a bad name, what with your comment about avoiding them. Pull them out of the ground, and they're not the loveliest sight. But roast 'em, boil 'em, grill 'em, peel 'em, slice 'em and beets are a gastronomical work of art. Please, Mr. President. Let us campaign for the mighty tuber.

Respectfully,

Your faithful beet-niks

Judy Seaborn, who co-owns Botanical Interest seed company in Broomfield, has a couple of theories as to why our president dislikes the nutritionally packed veggie.

"I actually didn't like beets when I was a kid," says Seaborn, who owns the company with her husband, Curtis Jones. "It could be he had a bad childhood experience. Canned beets? Blech."

Or it could be, she suggests, that he didn't like the way beets stained whatever else was on the plate.

Problem solved. The company's gourmet blend has seeds that produce multi-colored beets, from the classic deep red to the golden beet, which won't stain a thing.

Perhaps Obama thought the beet tasted a little too earthy. Without proper preparation, many people feel the same way, says Matteo Mazzullo, general manager of Cracovia Restaurant and Tavern in Westminster. He has a suggestion has a suggestion or two:

"Use fresh beets," Mazzullo says. "Even the ones in the stores, they may have been there a while, and they taste off."

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Combining the beet with other flavors, like sour cream, can mellow the beet's flavor, as well, he says.

His restaurant, which features several Polish dishes, relies heavily on the tuber, and the chef is a purist. None of those candy-striped or golden beets for him.

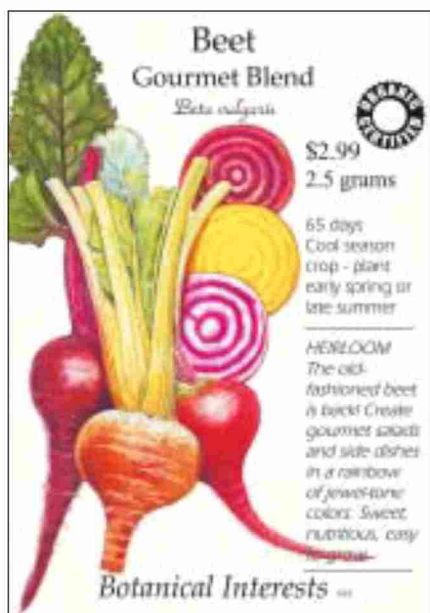
"We use only the red beets," Mazzullo says. "We'll offer our guests a sample of beet broth, which is a traditional dish and so delicious, or a beet root salad, and even those who thought they hated the beet change their minds."

Mazzullo, of course, would encourage you to head to his restaurant, but if you're experimenting at home, go to foodieview.com, where you'll find a rich harvest of recipes compiled by founder Howie Wang, founder of the online company. If Beet and Goat Cheese Crostini and Beet Carpaccio with Mint Vinagrette don't change your mind, Mr. President, there may be no hope.

The Detroit Red is the most popular beet because it grows well in every state and keeps that classic round shape, growers say. But the candy-striped varieties like the chioggia or the golden yellow beet are a little milder, Seaborn says. Roast them with a classic red beet, like the Detroit, or the carrot shaped Cylindra.

Peel them, slice them, alternate the colors when you plate them, drizzle a little olive oil on them, and you have a feast for the eyes and the mouth. A dish impressive enough for a king. Or a president.





Botanical Interests sells three beets that President Obama might like.



Freshly harvested beets at the Bi-Rite Market farm in Sonoma, Calif. *San Francisco Chronicle*