

A Brief History of Beetroot

Well, they say you can't beat a Beetroot, and apparently “they” have been saying it for quite some time. But who exactly are “they”? In this case it is just about anyone who wrote on health for the last 3000 years.

Apparently the Babylonians started it by cultivating the Beet some 4000 years ago, but then when the Greeks took over from them they only ate the leaves preferring to save the roots for medicine. Hippocrates however, the West's oft quoted 'Father of Medicine' also used the mineral rich leaves for binding and dressing wounds to help draw the skin back together, but by the time the Romans got a hold of it, the Beet was then being touted as just another aphrodisiac.

In the Talmud, the Jewish Book of laws, written in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, the rabbis more soberly recommend, “eating beetroot, drinking mead and bathing in the Euphrates”, as part of a prescription for a long and healthy life. When the Beet then reappears in Medieval English literature it is being used in a variety of imaginative ways by the Brits, with John Gerard noting in his *Herball* of 1597 that the juice from boiled White Beet, “conveighed up into the nostril doth gently draw forth flegme, and purgeth the head”. Culpeper confers, but states that it is the juice from the root of the red beet that, “put into the nostrils purgeth the head”. Furthermore, they also suggest that if the juice is snuffed up the nose, it also cures stinking breath!

By the time the Beetroot entered the renaissance, it was being used to assist digestion and as a tonic for the blood, and across the way in Russia and other Eastern European countries, the folk doctors were focused upon its ability to help in pale and weak individuals, or as a convalescence medicine after serious illness. Upon entering the 20th century the faithful Beetroot fell from favor, with Mrs. Grieve reflecting the view of her time in 1931 in “*A Modern Herbal*”, that “of old beetroot was considered to have distinct medicinal properties”, but concludes that, “modern medicine disregards the Beet”.

Resigned to it's place alongside the onion on the American hamburger, a second coming was in store for this unbeatable healer however, with the work of a Hungarian Doctor in the 1950's who reported dramatic successes in the treatment of cancer using Beetroot juice alone. Since that day science has come to the rescue with a veritable treasure trove of micro nutrients being discovered in the humble Beet. An antioxidant called Betanin found in red beets is one of these which has been shown in laboratory studies to inhibit a wide range of free radical activity, and thus increase the body's ability to resist many disease processes. In a modern nutritional program many practitioners such as myself suggest either the drinking of fresh beetroot juice to assist the Liver in detoxifying the blood, or roasting and stewing the whole beet as a tonic due to its deep sweet flavour and high mineral content. For the more adventuress souls however there is always Culpeper's method of snorting the juice, but beware of this powerful skin dye or you may end up looking like something from a horror film!

- The Barefoot Doctor