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Roasted Beet Salad with Walnut-Sherry Vinaigrette

I was never a big fan of beets until I grew my own. But once I tasted the earthy sweet flavor of oven roasted, fresh, tender beets; I was hooked. With this method, preparation and clean-up take only a few minutes. Pairing the beets with walnut-sherry vinaigrette and adding some toasted walnuts and a bit of Maytag blue cheese takes them from delicious to divine.

16 small red beets* (1 to 1 ½ inches in diameter)
2 tablespoons walnut oil
1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
¼ cup toasted walnuts
¼ cup Maytag blue cheese, crumbled (one ounce frozen and shaved)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil.

Cut the tops off the beets, leaving about 1 inch of the stems intact.

Scrub the beets clean under running cool water. (Do not dry or peel them.)

Arrange the damp beets in a single layer on a double sheet of heavy duty aluminum foil and fold the edges together to make a tightly sealed packet.

Place the packet, seam side up, on the foil lined baking tray and place it in the oven.

Bake for 30-40 minutes or until they are fork tender.

Take the packet out of the oven and allow them to cool for about 10 minutes.

Remove them from the packet and place them in a large bowl.

Wearing a pair of powder less, non latex gloves, gently rub the skins off the beets. (The skins should slip right off.)

Trim the stem and root ends as needed and slice the beets in quarters.

Arrange them on a serving plate.

Whisk the walnut oil, vinegar, salt and pepper together and drizzle over the beets.

Sprinkle the walnuts and blue cheese evenly over the beets and serve.

Serves 4.

*If you grow or can find golden beets or chionga beets, they would be beautiful in this salad. Roast the different varieties in separate packets so they don't "bleed" into each other.

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