

Want beetroot with that? Looking for the meeting of beetroot and hamburger

July 2025

In an idle moment the other day that hoary old question ‘when did beetroot first get onto the hamburger’ came to mind. Looking for the answer I dived into Trove, the digital repository of newspapers and magazines managed by the National Library and some Australian cookery books I have.

Did I find the answer? That’ll wait till I put before you some other ways I found for using beetroot.

First let’s be clear I am talking here about the purply red round version and not the sugar beet. Most recipes don’t describe the beetroot they are using but reading the recipe suggests they also are talking about the round type. Others make a point of its redness as a necessary aspect of the beetroot for the dish.

Take care not to overcook the beetroot or they will lose their lovely red colour.¹

Here’s the earliest recipe I came across from 1853.

Beet-root All my friends like the way
my beet-root is dressed. Let the roots be carefully
washed so as not to break the skin; have some boiling
water ready; boil one hour; when cold skim them,
and cut in slices in a dish; pepper and salt each layer;
when all cut, pour over some vinegar, with a little
cayenne pepper ; after a few hours pour over an equal
quantity of water.²

Edward Abbott in the earliest extant cookery book published in Australia his 1864 cookery book *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the “Upper Ten Thousand* is similarly plain about its use.

Beet- root – This root makes most excellent winter salad when dressed with pepper, oil, and vinegar, and they are elegant garnish for many dishes.^{3in 19}

In 1893 it appears as Harriet Wicken’s Beetroot and Onion Stew in Philip Muskett’s *The Art of Living in Australia*⁴. She also has a recipe for Beetroot Soup. This appears in 1911 in the *Kookaburra Cookery Book* in its more common guise as Bortsch – A Russian Soup .

Ingredients: 3 pints of stock in which the ordinary soup vegetables have been cooked, 1 raw beetroot, 3 boiled beetroots.

¹ Cream of Beetroot Soup, *The Queenslander Illustrated Weekly* 4 January 1934 p.35

² Beetroot, Useful Recipes *Adelaide Observer* 10 September 1853 p.2

³ Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the “Upper Ten Thousand”*, Sampson, Low, Son & Marston London 1864 p.40

⁴ Muskett, Philip E. *The Art of Living in Australia*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London.1893 p.228

Method: Slice all the beetroots and put in a saucepan with the stock, which should have been slightly seasoned with pepper and salt. Let it simmer until a very clear red colour, then strain through a fine strainer, return to the pan and let it boil a few minutes, serve very hot. Serve separately with lightly whipped cream.

Note – Add a dessertspoonful of vinegar when returning to a saucepan.⁵

Recipes for beetroot were many. This 1930 recipe for Beetroot Wine caught my fancy and won a Prize for Mrs. T. Davison.

Take four quarts of water, 4 lbs. beetroot and three pounds sugar. Wash and cut up beets, and boil in water till tender. Strain and boil the liquor again, with the sugar added, for twenty minutes. Strain again and add 1 oz. of yeast. A little ginger may be added if desired. Do not cork the bottle for 24 hours. If kept until dark and clear it will taste exactly like port wine.⁶

There were recipes for Polish Pickle⁷, Beetroot Chutney⁸, Beetroot Mould⁹, Preserved Beetroot¹⁰, and Beetroot Jam.

Four lb, beetroot, 3 lb. sugar, three lemons, 4 oz. almonds, 2 oz. glace ginger.

Wash and peel beetroot. Slice very thinly, or. put through a mincer. Place in a preserving pan. Cover with water and cook slowly till tender. Add sugar, chopped glace ginger, lemon juice and grated rind.. Cook gently till thick and clear, in about one hour. When nearly ready add blanched almonds, put through a mincer. Pot and seal.¹¹

A beetroot slice on a hamburger remained elusive.

Then I struck it luckyish with beetroot as a Sandwich Filling – at least beetroot, although chopped small, gets together with bread.

Cooked beetroot, 1 oz. of grated cheese, the yolk of 1 hard-boiled egg, and salt. Chop the beetroot very small. Crush the egg yolk and add the grated cheese. Add the beetroot and season with salt. Spread thickly on sandwiches spread with butter.¹²

⁵ The Lady Victoria Buxton Girls' Club Adelaide, *The Kookaburra Cookery Book*, South Australia, E.W. Cole, 1911 p. 6

⁶ Beetroot Wine, Winning Recipe, *Truth* 28 December 1930 p.13

⁷ Polish Pickle, *The Queenslander Illustrated Weekly*, 17 December 1931 p.38

⁸ Beetroot Chutney, *Moreton Mail*, 8 December 1933 p.5

⁹ Beetroot Mould, *The Land* 5 January 1934 p. 15

¹⁰ Preserved Beetroot, *The Daily News* 13 August 1936 p.10

¹¹ Beetroot Jam, *Daily Advertiser* 15 November 1937 p.3

¹² Beetroot Sandwich Filling, *The Maitland Daily Mercury* 15 August 1939 p.3

And then there it was in 1946:

Great Change

The change in the hamburger shop was even more astounding. Bowls of sliced tomato, lettuce, beetroot, sauce and mustard were neatly protected with strips of muslin cloth. Approved metal food-holders were lying beside.¹³

Search over I reckon.

¹³ Great Change, Clean Up After Filth Disclosures, *The Sun* 1 November 1946 p. 5