

# OKRA



**OKRA** originated in the 12th century B.C. in Egypt and eventually spread through North Africa to the Mediterranean. Okra likes warm climates and is grown very successfully in the Southern United States. In the Northeast okra matures in the heat of the summer. Look for okra in July, August, and September. Gumbo, a thick tomato-based stew made with okra, is eaten in many parts of the world, including the Southern U.S.



## STORAGE

- ◆ Okra will keep for a few days stored **unwashed in a paper bag** in the refrigerator drawer.
- ◆ To **freeze**, wash okra and trim stems. Blanch in boiling water for 3 minutes, then plunge in ice water. Drain, spread on trays and freeze. When frozen, transfer to freezer bags or plastic containers.

## PREPARATION

- ◆ Wash okra well and trim stems. Cook whole or cut into smaller pieces.
- ◆ Cooked okra produces **a gummy texture** that is useful for thickening gumbos or stews and binding vegetable juices into a sauce. Some people dislike okra's "slimy" texture, but there are many ways to reduce this quality and still enjoy this delicious vegetable.
- ◆ To reduce the gummy texture of okra, try cooking it whole and either steaming or grilling it. **Steam** 4-6 minutes and serve with butter and lemon. Prepare okra for grilling by brushing with olive oil and sprinkling with salt. **Grill** on both sides until lightly marked and serve with lemon.
- ◆ **Frying** is another popular way to prepare okra. Dip sliced okra in egg, then flour, or toss in cornmeal. Fry 3-4 minutes until golden brown.

### **Nutritional Information**

Okra is a good source of many nutrients, including fiber, folic acid, vitamin C and folate. Adequate intake of fiber is helpful in maintaining low cholesterol levels and aids in digestion. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption. A healthy diet with enough folate may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with certain birth defects of the brain or spinal chord.

# Okra Recipes

## Okra Rice Combo

- 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 cups okra, cut into 1/2 inch slices
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 cup chopped green or red pepper
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 1/2 cups corn kernels
- 1 cup uncooked long grain rice
- Dash of cayenne powder or Tabasco sauce
- 1 cup chopped fresh tomatoes



In a large pan, over medium flame, heat oil . Add chopped okra, onion and pepper and cook about 5 minutes. Add broth, corn, rice and cayenne or hot sauce. Bring to a boil and stir once. Simmer, uncovered for about 20 minutes or until the rice is done. Stir in the tomatoes, heat over low heat and serve immediately.

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## Fried Okra

- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 egg
- Tender young okra pods, washed and sliced
- Corn meal
- Vegetable oil



In small bowl, beat milk and egg together. Dip okra in the milk-egg mixture, then coat with corn meal. In a large skillet, heat oil. When oil is hot add okra pieces and fry until they are tender and the cornmeal is lightly brown, about ten minutes.

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## Stir-Fry

- 2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 sweet red pepper or hot pepper (or both), chopped
- 1 small zucchini, chopped
- 2 carrots chopped
- Okra, as much as you like, chopped
- 6 basil leaves, chopped
- 2 Tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon honey



In a frying pan, over medium heat, sauté garlic and onion until onion looks clear. Add pepper, zucchini, carrot, and okra, cook until tender. Add chopped basil and stir fry until wilted. Stir in soy sauce and honey. Serve immediately over rice.

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