

# Vegetable of the Month

## Okra



Okra grows in an elongated, lantern shape vegetable. It is a fuzzy, green colored, and ribbed pod that is approximately 2-7 inches in length. This vegetable is more famously known by its rows of tiny seeds and slimy or sticky texture when cut open. Okra is also known as bamia, bindi, bhindi, lady's finger, and gumbo, is a member of the cotton (Mallow) family.

Okra was discovered around Ethiopia during the 12th century B.C. and was cultivated by the ancient Egyptians. This vegetable soon flourished throughout North Africa and the Middle East where the seed pods were consumed cooked and the seeds toasted, ground, and served as a coffee substitute. With the advent of the slave trade, it eventually came to North America and is now commonly grown in the southern United States. You'll now see okra in African, Middle Eastern, Greek, Turkish, Indian, Caribbean, and South American cuisines.

Okra is commonly associated in Southern, Creole, and Cajun cooking since it was initially introduced into the United States in its southern region. It grows well in the southern United States where there is little frost.

Okra is a powerhouse of valuable nutrients. It is a good source of vitamin C and A, also B complex vitamins, iron and calcium. It is low in calories, a good source of dietary fiber, and is fat-free.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size (50g)	
Servings Per Container	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories 15</b>	<b>Calories from Fat 0</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat 0g</b>	<b>0%</b>
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
<b>Cholesterol 0mg</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium 0mg</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate 4g</b>	<b>1%</b>
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 1g	
<b>Protein 1g</b>	
Vitamin A 6%	• Vitamin C 20%
Calcium 4%	• Iron 2%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000    2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g    80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g    25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg    300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg    2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g    375g
Dietary Fiber	25g    30g
Calories per gram:	
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

## Okra varieties

**Clemson** variety is dark green with angular pods. This okra takes less than two months to mature.

**Emerald** type is dark green, with smooth round pods.

**Lee** is a spineless type known by its deep bright green, very straight angular pods.

**Annie Oakley** is a hybrid, spineless kind of okra with bright green, angular pods. It takes less than two months from seeding to maturity.

**Chinese okra** is a dark green type grown in California and reaches 10 to 13 inches in length. These extra-long okra pods are sometimes called "ladyfingers."

**Purple Okra** a rare variety you may see at peak times. There is a version grown for its leaves that resemble sorrel in New Guinea.

### Availability, Selection, and Storage

Okra is available year-round, with a peak season during the summer months. It is available either frozen or fresh. When buying fresh okra, make sure that you select dry, firm, okra. They should be medium to dark green in color and blemish-free. Fresh okra should be used the same day that it was purchased or stored paper bag in the warmest part of the refrigerator for 2-3 days. Severe cold temperatures will speed up okra decay. Do not wash the okra pods until ready to use, or it will become slimy.

### Preparation

When preparing, remember that the more it is cut, the slimier it will become. Its various uses allow for okra to be added to many different recipes. Okra is commonly used as a thicken agent in soups and stews because of its sticky core. However, okra may also be steamed, boiled, pickled, sautéed, or stir-fried whole. Okra is a sensitive vegetable and should not be cooked in pans made of iron, copper or brass since the chemical properties turns okra black.



## **Young Versus Mature Okra - What is the difference?**

Most okra pods are ready to be harvested in less than two months of planting. If the okra is going to be consumed, then these pods must be harvested when they are very young. They are usually picked when they are two to three inches long, or tender stage.

Okra pods grow quickly from the tender to tough stage. Pods are considered mature when they exceed three inches in length. Mature okra is tough and is not recommended for use in certain recipes.

## **How do I reduce okra slime?**

Most people who have eaten or have cooked okra, know about the okra slime. Some recipes call for the whole okra, but how do you deal with the okra slime?

There are few ways to minimize the slime:

- Simply trim the off the ends and avoid puncturing the okra capsule.
- You can also minimize the slime factor by avoiding the tendency to overcook okra.

## Make Okra part of your 5 to 9 A Day Plan!



- Boil or microwave whole until just tender. Dress with lemon juice and ground pepper.
- Stew with tomatoes. Serve over rice.
- Add okra to curries or sauté with spices like cumin, coriander, turmeric, or curry powder.
- If okra is used in a soup, stew or casserole that requires longer cooking, it should be cut up, to exude its juices, and thicken.
- Okra pods can be sliced, dipped in egg, breaded with corn meal and baked.
- Sauté okra with corn kernels, onion and sweet peppers for a tasty side dish.
- Okra has a similar flavor to eggplant and can be used as a substitute in your favorite recipes.
- Use raw okra in your tossed salads.



## Okra with Rice and Beans

Makes 2 servings

Each serving equals three and one-half 5 A Day servings

1/2 cups onions, chopped  
2 cups tomatoes, chopped  
1 tsp sesame oil  
1 cup okra, sliced  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1/2 cup vegetable low-sodium vegetable broth  
2 cups brown rice, cooked  
1 cup black beans, canned

In a medium size saucepan, sauté the onions and tomatoes in the oil for 5 minutes. Add the okra, garlic, salt, pepper and bouillon cube. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes. Serve hot over the rice and beans.



Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 387, protein 13g, fat 5g, percent calories from fat 10%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 80g, fiber 14g, sodium 453mg

## **Spicy Stir-Fried Okra**

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals two 5 A Day servings

1 lb fresh okra, trimmed and sliced into 1/2" thick rounds

1 cup onion, thinly sliced

1 Tbsp olive oil

1-1/2 tsp lemon juice

1/2 tsp ground cumin

1/4 tsp ground fennel

1/8 tsp cayenne pepper

1/2 tsp salt

In non-stick frying pan, sauté okra and onion in oil, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes. If okra looks dry, add 3 tablespoons water and/or cover the pan during cooking.

When vegetables are soft, add in lemon juice. Reduce heat and add cumin, fennel, cayenne and salt. Stir for 2 minutes, or until flavors are blended. Serve warm.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 76, protein 3g, fat 3g, percent calories from fat 28%, cholesterol 0mg, carbohydrates 13g, fiber 5g, sodium 246mg

## **Okra and Cornmeal**

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

2 cups water

2 cups okra

1 cup white cornmeal

1/2 tsp salt

1/4 cup soft butter

In a large saucepan, bring water to a boil, add okra and cook for about 10 minutes. Remove the okra with a slotted spoon and set aside.

Using the same saucepan, increase heat until the water boils briskly. Slowly add the cornmeal, stirring continuously to prevent lumping. Add the salt and okra. Cook and continue stirring for 10 to 12 minutes.

Remove from heat and add the butter a piece at a time, stirring after each addition, until all the butter is incorporated. Serve hot.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 324, protein 7g, fat 10g, percent calories from fat 28%, cholesterol 21mg, carbohydrates 50g, fiber 8g, sodium 321mg

## **Vegetable Delight**

Makes 8 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

Source: Produce for Better Health

1 Tbsp butter, whipped  
1/2 cup onions, chopped  
1/2 cup green peppers, chopped  
1 clove garlic  
1 package frozen okra  
16 ounce can diced tomatoes  
1/4 tsp Oregano  
1/2 tsp Salt  
1/2 tsp Pepper

In large saucepan or Dutch oven, sauté onion, pepper and garlic in margarine until tender. Combine remaining ingredients and cook 5 minutes or until bubbly, stirring frequently. Serve warm.

Nutritional analysis per serving: calories 44, protein 2g, fat 1g, percent calories from fat 20%, cholesterol 3mg, carbohydrates 8g, fiber 3g, sodium 198mg