



SIMPLY GOOD FOOD

Okra

Okra is really best when stewed or simmered, which allows its juices to lightly thicken a dish, although it can be simply sautéed, steamed, or boiled.

There is nothing controversial about the flavor of okra: it has a subtle taste similar to that of eggplant. Okra complements tomatoes, peppers, corn, lamb, ham, bacon, and other smoky meats—and is enhanced by spices such as coriander. It is also particularly delicious combined with shellfish, and with fish and fish stock.

Marketing: The best okra is the freshest okra, so if you are restricted to market purchases, select bright green pods no longer than 2 ½-3 inches. Feel them—they should be tender and easily snapped. Old pods get fibrous and woody, and darken when exposed to air.

Storage and Preserving:

- Pick just before cooking, because the pods lose their bright green color and toughen up in storage. If you must store okra, spread the pods out flat, without washing, and place in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator. (When okra is stored wet, it molds on the outside and becomes even slimier inside.) A day or two in the refrigerator is all the storing okra will take. Freeze any you can not use by then.

Freezing

- Freeze only young, tender okra. Wash, and trim off stems, leaving caps whole. Blanch in boiling water for 4 minutes. Cool in ice water for 4 minutes. Drain, and loosely pack in freezer bags. Will keep 6-8 months.

Nutritional Information: Okra contains both soluble and insoluble fiber. Soluble fiber helps to have serum cholesterol which helps reduce the risk of heart disease. Insoluble fiber helps reduce the risk of some forms of cancer, especially colorectal cancer. In a ½ cup serving of cooked okra, you get about 10% of the recommended levels of B6 and Folic Acid.

- Yields:**
- 1 pound okra = 10-12 ounces trimmed = 3-4 cups sliced
 - 1 pound = 3-4 servings

- Hints:**
- Use cut okra pieces to thicken soups or stews.
 - Add to stewed vegetables.
 - Use sliced cooked okra in omelets and quiches. Use with tomatoes for the best results. The flavors are complementary.
 - Cook sliced okra in butter along with onions and ham. Combine with cooked rice and use to stuff hollowed-out tomatoes. Bake for 10 minutes at 400 degrees.

Microwave

If you have a microwave oven and want to eat okra plain, one pound stemmed and washed okra, placed in a dish with only the water clinging to it, takes 6 minutes to cook covered.

Leftovers

- Add to egg dishes such as omelets and quiches.
- Reheat with cooked rice, or sauté with cooked potatoes.

Finishing Touches for Blanched and Steamed Okra

- *With butter and Lemon:* Drain okra; lightly sauté in butter and lemon juice. Season to taste.
- *With Tomatoes and Cucumbers:* Cool okra in cold water. Drain and pat dry. Cut into ¼-½-inch slices; combine with chopped tomatoes and cucumbers.
- *With Vinaigrette:* Dress with a lemon vinaigrette sauce. Serve chilled.
- *Deep-Fried Okra:* Slightly undercook okra. Cook, drain, and pat dry. Roll in bread crumbs or corn meal, and fry in hot oil. Drain on paper towels; season with salt and pepper.

Okra Soup

- ½ lb okra
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup chopped onions
- ½ cup chopped celery
- ½ cup chopped minced green peppers
- ½ cup minced carrots (optional)
- 2 cups roughly chopped, peeled, seeded tomatoes (or use canned)
- 7 cups chicken stock (preferably homemade)
- ½ cup raw rice
- 1 cup small lima beans
- 2 cups corn kernels
- 1-1 ½ cups minced chicken (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Wash, dry, and steam okra and cut into ¼-inch slices. Heat butter in a large saucepan; cook onions, celery, peppers, and carrots (if you wish) until wilted, 5-10 minutes. Add okra; sauté for 5 minutes, stirring until the "roping" of the mucilage diminishes. Add tomatoes and chicken stock. Bring to a boil, stir in rice, reduce heat, and simmer covered for 10 minutes. Add lima beans. Simmer 10 minutes longer. Add corn and chicken (if desired); heat through for approximately 5 minutes. Season to taste and serve. (Makes 2 quarts)

- Omit beans and corn; slightly increase the amount of okra.
- Experiment with different vegetable combinations, such as chopped summer squash or green beans, retaining the okra for thickening.
- Make a shellfish soup. Replace chicken stock and chicken with shellfish stock and crabmeat or shrimp.

Okra and Tomato Stew

Okra and tomatoes are the ideal combination, as the tomato's acidity offsets okra's somewhat gluey texture. Use this simple stew as a base for other vegetable combinations, or eat as is.

- 1 lb okra
- 1 lb tomatoes
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 small hot red pepper (optional)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 cup chopped onions
- ½ cup chopped celery (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Clean and trim okra; cut into ½-inch pieces. Peel, seed, and chop tomatoes. Finely mince garlic and chili pepper (if using it). Heat butter and oil in a sauté pan. Stir in the okra, onions, and celery (if you wish); sauté until lightly colored, about 10 minutes. Add garlic, tomatoes, and chili pepper; sauté 3-4 minutes longer. Reduce heat, and simmer for 10-15 minutes or until the okra is tender. Season to taste and serve. (Serves 4-6)

- Cook bacon in fat instead of butter and oil; top with crumbled bacon.
- For a main course, add ½-inch cubes of sautéed cooked ham. Serve with rice.
- Use other vegetables, such as thin rounds of carrots, corn, lima beans, or small green bean pieces.

Source: *The Victory Garden Cookbook, Joy of Cooking.*

Supporting State Extension Goal: Health, Safety and Well Being

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