

OKRA (*Abelmoschus esculentus*)



Full Sun



Part
Shade



Okra loves warm weather

Okra is primarily a hot-weather tropical vegetable that can be grown in both northern and southern gardens. A tall-growing annual often called gumbo, it grows best in the southern states, where two crops of it can be grown in a single year.

The culture of Okra

The spring okra crop can be planted as soon as all danger of frost has passed. In most mild regions, plant the fall crop from June 1 to July 1. The fruits can be harvested from 55 to 65 days after seeding, depending on the variety. Always plant seed when the earth has warmed, since okra is a warm-weather plant and will not stand cool weather and soil.

Planting Okra

Okra thrives in any well-drained, good garden soil in full sunlight. If the soil is wet, the seed tend to rot, so good drainage is necessary. Okra is hard to transplant, but in very northern places the seed can be started in cold frames or hotbeds and transplanted into the garden with caution.

Although okra will do well in any kind of ground, thorough preparation of the soil is very important. These woody plants can take on all the food given them. Because okra grows rapidly, nitrogen is particularly needed. Poultry manure is splendid material for okra beds. Since it is very strong, only about one-tenth as much chicken manure as other animal manures can be used.

Compost, leaf mold, peat moss, and wood ashes can be used to advantage to improve poor soil in the garden. Peat moss and leaf mold are usually acid and a slight amount of lime should be used along with either of these two materials. These soil builders should be plowed under in the winter well before the planting time, or in a small home garden they can be spaded under in the early spring.

The rows should be at least three to five feet apart. The stalks are bushy and can become quite large when well fertilized and during rainy seasons. Scatter the seed in drills or plant loosely in hills and cover to a depth of one to two inches, according to the compactness of the soil. The seed should be separated three or four inches to allow space for the development of the stems.

If weather is warm, germination should take place within a few days. But if there is a heavy rainfall in the meanwhile, the soil should be lightly cultivated between the rows and the crust broken up over the seed by means of a garden rake. This is suggested where the soil contains clay or is heavy. Sandy loam will probably not need any such treatment, as the seed will come through when the soil has been drained or the water has been evaporated by the action of the sun. After plants become established, thin them to stand 15 inches apart and mulch lightly.

Insects that attack okra

The okra plant is not subject to attack from many insects, but the bollworm may be a problem. It

bores into the pods and thus injures them. The stinkbug also attacks the pods, piercing them and extracting the juices. Since damage from the latter occurs late in the season, the loss is very little. Blister beetles and leaf beetles often feed upon the foliage of okra but these pests do little harm to the pod and scarcely influence the production of pods at all. Handpicking usually keeps these insects well under control.

Harvesting okra

For continuous production, pods should be gathered every day when they are one to four inches long, depending on the variety. They should still be soft and the seed should be only half grown if pods are to be eaten. If it is necessary to keep the pods over 24 hours, they should be spread out in a cool place and slightly moistened. They should be given ventilation because they become heated when kept in closed crates or boxes.

Varieties of okra

The Dwarf Green Long Pod matures in 50 days, as does the Perkins Mammoth, sometimes called Green Long Pod. White Velvet takes 60 days to mature but this is the standard okra for many markets in the South. The Clemson Spineless okra mature in about 60 days and has uniform dark green spineless, long pods. Emerald is another variety often planted.