

Okra

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Okra is now a regular addition to our garden. Okra is a plant that likes warm weather and does well even in hot dry conditions, but of course will respond to water. We love this vegetable because it just keeps bearing and bearing right up until frost. We usually have a small patch in the garden and the pods rarely make it home to the table because we eat them while we are working in the garden. There are thousands of recipes for cooking with okra.



Okra Pods – showing an over mature pod, a perfect pod to pick and a pod that needs another day to mature

We have grown both purple and green varieties, which both taste the same to us. Okra is in the mallow family and a cousin to cotton, hibiscus and hollyhock. It is a vegetable that originated in Africa and seems to have followed the importation of slaves to the southern U.S.A., the Carribean, and South America. Okra is very popular in the southern states but can be grown much farther north.



Purple Okra – showing a pickable pod, developing blossoms, and a blossom separating from a new pod

Okra seeds are planted once the soil warms up in the spring. It takes about 60 days after planting for the okra to start blossoming. Similar to the cotton plant, the blossom only lasts about a day. Pods quickly develop and are ready to pick in 4 -5 days in warm weather. If the pods grow longer than about 4 inches, they become tough and less appetizing. If pods grow too long it is best to cut them off the plant and put them in your compost bin.



Okra Blossom – showing

pickable pods, an open blossom and developing blossoms. This is a very vigorous plant.

In our community garden, we planted purple okra in rows and our neighbor planted her green okra in a group in an area about 6 feet by 3 feet. We planted earlier and had some insect problems and she planted later and her plants got off to a better start. Our plants have never caught up with hers, but are still bearing nicely. If you have never grown okra before, we suggest giving it a try. It is relatively easy to grow and produces a lot of pods. And there are an endless variety of ways to eat it. Surely you will like one of them!!



Okra Planted in a Group vs. a Row