North Carolina Cooperative Extension - Cleveland County Center

Cleveland County Kitchen

Developed by: Nancy Abasiekong, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences and Annie Thompson, Extension Admin. Assistant

August 2015

Food of the Month - Okra

Okra – A Nutritious Southern Summer Treat! Okra, a warm season crop grown by farmers and in many area home gardens, is considered a real Southern summer favorite. Do you enjoy this unique vegetable, in spite of its characteristic sticky center? Okra is 'in-season' in North Carolina July through September. You can find fresh okra at farmers' markets, local farm stands and at times, at some grocery stores. Select the freshest, small pods for the best flavor and quality.

Most okra fans have eaten the traditional Southern favorites – fried okra and eaten it as a thickener in Gumbo. There are many other ways to enjoy okra. It can be eaten raw, pickled, roasted, sautéed, fried, or steamed.

Did you know?

- Okra (Hibiscus esculentus) belongs to the mallow family, which includes hibiscus and cotton.
- Okra is known as "gumbo" or "lady's fingers" in various parts of the world.
- Okra's origin is unclear – it is said to have originated either in South Asia or from western Africa and Ethiopia.
- Okra is grown in many tropical regions, i.e. Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and southern United States (it cannot be planted until the soil has warmed up in spring).
- French colonist in Louisiana began to use okra in their regional dishes in the early 1700s; okra was grown as far north as Philadelphia in 1748.
- Thomas Jefferson reported okra to be part of Virginia gardens, and grown at Monticello, before 1781.

Nutrition Facts Label for Okra

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup raw okra (50g)
Servings Per Container 1

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 15	Calories from Fat 0
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 4g	1%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 1g	
Vitamin A 8% •	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:

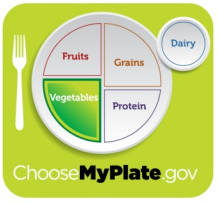
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Inside This Issue:

Nutrition Facts

Okra's impressive nutritional values are shown here on the Nutrition Facts Label that shows facts based on a ½ cup serving of raw okra. Keep health tips in mind when preparing okra so you don't add too many extra calories. Okra is one of the green vegetables that can give variety and help you make half your plate fruits and vegetables. See the ChooseMyPlate icon below as a guide.



Nutritional benefits - Okra is a good source of:

- Vitamin K, is the most abundant vitamin in okra (39.1% Daily Value)
- Vitamin C – approximately 40% of the daily value – helps maintain and repair tissues, skin, teeth and bones.
- Folic acid and 3 other B-vitamins
- Minerals: magnesium (14.3% daily value), calcium and potassium (each 8 % daily value) helps in maintaining bone and teeth health
- Low in calories (1/2 cup contains 15 calories)
- Fat free: cholesterol free
- Very low in sodium
- Excellent source of soluble fiber

Developed by: Nancy Abasiekong, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences and Annie Thompson, Extension Admin. Assistant August 2015

Selection/Storage

Okra is perishable and should be handled with care. Choose okra that is:

- Brightly colored – green pods that are blemish free.
- Crisp, tender, but firm pods.
- Small pods that are 2 – 3 inches long.

Avoid:

- Pods that are too large or hard (they will be tough and fibrous)
- Pods that are too soft or overripe
- Discard pods that are turning brown
- Pods that are dry or have a dull appearance

Storage Tips:

- Store unwashed, dry okra in the refrigerator vegetable crisper in a loosely closed plastic produce bag
- Use within 2-3 days

If harvesting okra from your own garden, plan to check and cut pods frequently. Okra pods will be ready to cut 4-7 days after the flower opens. Harvest every other day, selecting pods that are tender and small (2-4'' long for most varieties).

To Prepare:

Just before cooking, wash okra pods in cool water.

Cut off stem end. Cut into ¼ -½ inch slices or leave small pods whole.

Enjoy okra as a thickener in soups/stews or in recipes with tomatoes, corn, onions, and/or yellow squash.

The most common ways to eat okra are: breaded and fried or used in gumbo but there are many other ways to prepare & enjoy okra.

To Freeze Okra:

Freezing is the best way to preserve okra for extended use. Select young tender pods – separate by size: small pods – 4 inches and less; large pods – over 4 inches.
Wash okra, trim stems. Blanch small pods 3 minutes and large pods 4 minutes. Cool and drain. Leave whole or cut crosswise into rounds. Package, seal and freeze.

For Frying - Slice blanched pods crosswise and dredge with flour or meal. Spread in a single layer on a shallow pan. Freeze just until firm. Package, seal and freeze.

Serving Ideas:

- Okra can be steamed like other vegetables – place small pods in steaming basket and place over boiling water. Cook 5-8 minutes, depending on size. Remove and season as desired.
- **Sautéed okra** - In a heavy skillet, heat 1 Tbs. olive oil (or 1 tsp. butter and 2 tsp. olive oil) over medium-high heat until hot, but not smoking. Add about 1/2 pound washed and sliced okra. Sauté 3-4 minutes or until okra is bright green with slight browning. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, to taste. Serve hot.

Developed by: Nancy Abasiekong, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences and Annie Thompson, Extension Admin. Assistant August 2015

Roasted Okra

Preheat oven to 375°F. Wash and dry about 12 (3-inch) pods per serving. Do not cut off ends. Place on cookie sheet prepared with olive oil. Bake about 15 to 20 minutes, or until starting to brown. The okra gets crispier the longer you cook it - be careful to not burn it! Try roasting okra on the grill as well!
Season with salt and black pepper, to taste. Or season with a garlic and Italian herb mixture before roasting.

Source: NC Cooperative Extension, The Produce Lady

Okra Nuggets

2 cups okra, cut into 1-inch rounds
1 tsp. salt
1/4 cup flour
1 egg
1/2 cup cornmeal
1/4 cup Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place the flour and salt in a bowl and stir to combine. Whisk the egg in a second bowl. Place the cornmeal and Parmesan cheese in a third bowl and stir to combine. Roll the okra in the flour and pat to remove excess flour. Dip the flour coated okra in egg and then roll in the cornmeal/parmesan mixture to coat. Place the okra on a cookie sheet sprayed with olive oil and when all the okra nuggets are on the tray, spray again to lightly coat. Bake for 15 minutes or until golden. Serves 4.

Source: NC Cooperative Extension, The Produce Lady

Okra and Corn with Tomatoes

Ingredients:

2 tbsp. olive oil
1 large onion, diced
1/2 tsp. each red pepper, thyme and basil
1 green pepper, seeded and diced
3 large, fresh, ripe tomatoes, chopped
2 cups fresh corn
2 cups small okra pods, left whole or cut into ¼ inch thick rounds
1/2 cup water or chicken broth
3/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. black pepper

Directions:

In large skillet, heat olive oil and add onions and spices. Sauté until onions are limp. Add bell pepper and cook until onions are translucent. Add tomatoes, okra, water, salt and pepper. Reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add corn and cook 5 minutes longer. Serve hot. Serves 8.

Source: NC Cooperative Extension, The Produce Lady.

Fried Okra

16 small pods of okra
1/2 teaspoon salt
black pepper to taste
1/4 cup cornmeal
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
Slice pods of okra crosswise, about 1/4 inch thick.
Mix salt & pepper with the cornmeal in a bowl or a bag.
Add okra slices to mixture to coat
Heat oil in a skillet. Fry okra until brown.
Yield:4-4-podservings Nutritional Analysis: 100 calories, 2 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 7 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 290 mg sodium.
Source: University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service

NC Cooperative Extension **August 2015**
Cleveland County Center
130 South Post Road, Suite 1
Shelby, NC 28090
704-482-4365
cleveland.ces.ncsu.edu
clevelandcountykitchen.org

Developed by: Nancy Abasiekong, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences and Annie Thompson, Extension Administrative Assistant

Developed by: Nancy Abasiekong, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences and Annie Thompson, Extension Admin. Assistant August 2015

Veggie Stir-Fry

1 tsp. margarine
1/2 onion (chopped)
1 tomato (diced)
2 ears of corn (cut from cob or 2 cups frozen)
10 okra pods (sliced - 1/4 inch thick rounds)
3 yellow squash, medium (sliced)

In a frying pan over medium heat, cook margarine, onion, corn, squash and okra for 5 minutes until tender.

Add diced tomatoes and continue cooking for 3 minutes.

Source: University of Kentucky, Cooperative Extension Service, Food and Nutrition Calendar, 2004 Fresh Ideas for Fit Families

Okra and Shrimp

Ingredients:

1 pound young okra pods
1 pound shrimp
4 large tomatoes
1 medium onion, chopped
1 medium green bell pepper, chopped
1/2 cup white wine
6 Tbs olive oil
2 Tbs lemon juice
2 Tbs parsley, finely chopped
Salt and pepper, to taste

Directions:

1. Wash okra and cut off ends. Cut the pods into approximately ¼ inch rounds.
2. Peel and devein the shrimp.
3. Peel the tomatoes by placing them in a saucepan of boiling water for 30 seconds. Remove tomatoes from the boiling water with a slotted spoon and plunge into icy water. The skins should peel off easily. (coarsely chop)
4. Peel and coarsely chop the onions. Seed and coarsely chop bell pepper.
5. Heat the oil in a large skillet. Place the chopped onion and bell pepper in the skillet and sauté until the onion becomes translucent.
6. Add all the other ingredients, except the shrimp, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat immediately and simmer until the tomatoes are soft. Stir occasionally.
7. Add the shrimp and continue cooking for about 4 minutes or until the shrimp becomes opaque. Do not overcook or shrimp will become tough.
8. Serve hot over brown rice. Yield: 4 servings

Source: NC Cooperative Extension, Union County Center, Sally's Kitchen, Sally McNeil, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences

Potato & Okra Medley

1/4 cup cornmeal
4 medium potatoes, cut into 1/2 inch cubes
1/4 cup canola oil
1 cup onions, chopped
1 lb. okra, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 green or red tomato, large dice
1/4 tsp black pepper
1/2 tsp kosher salt (or 1/4 tsp. seasoned salt)

Place cornmeal into gallon-size plastic storage bag. Add potatoes and shake to coat. In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons oil. Add potato cubes and cook for about 10 minutes until lightly browned. Add onions to potatoes and cook an additional 5 minutes. Coat okra in cornmeal. Add 1 additional tablespoon of oil and okra to skillet. Cook an additional 15 minutes. Add last tablespoon of oil and diced tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper. Mix gently and cook about 2-3 minutes longer or until tomatoes are heated and ingredients have developed slight crust. Adjust seasonings as desired.

Source: NC Cooperative Extension, Cleveland County Center, Nancy H. Abasiekong, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences