

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*)**

A cultivated and gladly eaten vegetable in Crete

(A contribution to "Crete agriculture")



The okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) (bamyá) is also cultivated in Crete [Messara]. Known in many English-speaking countries as **lady's fingers** or **gumbo**, it is a flowering plant in the mallow family and originated from the Highlands of East Africa, specifically in Ethiopia.

The shrub reaches heights up to 2.5 meters; on Crete it remains approximately 1 meter below (see **fig.**: Okra cultivation between *Aghii Deka* [Άγιοι Δέκα] and *Vayonia* [Βαγιονιά]/ South Crete). It has denticulate leaflets and large yellow flowers. As with all members of the subfamily Malvoideae are the many stamens connate to a tube surrounding the stamp, the so called Columna. The capsule fruits, colloquially called sheet ropes, reach a length of 10 to 15 cm. The skin is light to dark green with a fine fluff. The fruits contain white seeds.



The okra is one of the oldest vegetable. It was already cultivated at least 3,000 years ago by the Egyptians on the banks of the Nile, but probably grown since already 4,000 years. Today it is spread as vegetable almost around the world. The word "Okra" is borrowed from a West African language, probably from Igbo or Akan. The seeds are soaked overnight for cultivation and brought up to a depth of 1-2 cm into the ground for sowing. Germination takes place within 6 days (soaked seeds) and 3 weeks. The seedlings need plenty of water. The unripe "pods" are harvested after flowering, pollination and fruit formation; otherwise they are too fibrous and hard (to be used as vegetables). The Cretans say: "today still tender, tomorrow hard - harvesting is an experience thing".

The low-calorie and comparable in taste to green beans pods, the okra are eaten as a vegetable in Crete; they can be consumed also raw. The taste is neutral, mild to herb.

They give off a slimy substance during cooking, suited to thickening dishes. If you have no interest in or would like to abstain from slimy substance, you can either blanching the okra 5 minutes in vinegar water (prior cut top and remove peduncle) and refresh with cold water or soak the okra before processing for 1-2 hours in cold lemon barley water.

Soft pods are best suited to ten inches long. They can be combined well with tomatoes, onions and sweet peppers. Because the soft pods are easily perishable, stores it chilled in a paper bag and no longer than three days

The mature seeds of the fruits can also eaten grilled or used as coffee substitute.

**Web links about Okra:** [Commons: Okra](#) (Album with pictures and/or videos and audio files); <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okra>

**Okra medicative effect:** The okra contains vegetable mucilage that provides valuable services to the regeneration of small and large intestine flora. It improves fertile soil in the intestine, so that the micro organisms can best flourish. In America the okra is top on the list of anti cancer vegetable. U.S. doctors advise people with mucous membrane inflammation in ear, nose and lungs and stomach diseases to take the cooking water of okra as drink. It strengthens the mucous membranes and the immune system. Culture of red blood cell formation is activated and "sleeping memory cells" are brought up to speed. The high mineral content keeps blood pressure and circulation The high mineral content keeps stable blood pressure and circulation.

**Okra recipes:** in particular "Cretan art", are very numerous in the internet, whether raw, in tomato sauce (see fig.) or Okra with chicken, there are almost no limits. But it remains a matter of taste for the Central Europeans.



A small anecdote, describes Colin Spencer in his book: "The Vegetable Book": "I used Okras for the first time in the 1950s. I treated them like every other vegetables, have given the pods in slightly salted water and blanched for about five minutes. Then I discovered something that would have suited for a horror movie: a thoroughgoing sticky pulp, a mixture of decaying vegetable and frogspawn. I threw everything away and haven't had the courage to try Okras for years. I must confess that I missed a lot. Okras are through after a minute or two in the Pan. The plant adhesive emerges only, if you cook it longer than a few minutes in water. (Source: the above named book).

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