



Easy Gardening

OKRA • OKRA • OKRA • OKRA • OKRA • OKRA

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Ookra is a warm-season vegetable that grows well in most Texas soils. A fair source of vitamin A, it can be eaten in many ways, including boiled, fried, and cooked in soups, gumbos, and casseroles.

Varieties

The best okra varieties to grow in Texas are Annie Oakley (Compact), Blondy (Compact), Cajun Delight, Clemson Spineless, Emerald, Green Best, Lee, Louisiana Green, Prelude (Compact), Long Pod Dwarf (Compact), Stewart's Zeebest (Heirloom), Burgundy, and Velvet.

Site selection

For good yields, okra must grow in full sunlight in fertile, well-drained soil.

Soil preparation

Work the soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to garden tools. Spade

or turn the soil as deeply as possible. Okra will grow best in soil that has been worked 8 to 10 inches deep.

Remove all rocks and trash from the soil, and then rake it soil smooth.

Planting

For the best yields, plant okra in the spring 2 to 3 weeks after all danger of frost has passed. For a good fall crop, plant at least 3 months before the first fall frost.

Plant the okra seeds about 1 inch deep and 2 inches apart in the row (Fig. 1). Space the rows at least 3 feet apart.

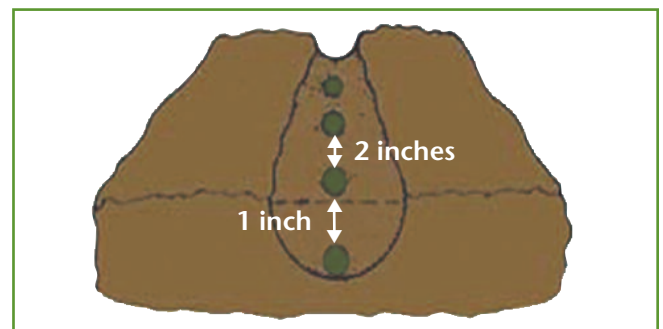


Figure 1. Plant okra seeds about 2 inches apart and 1 inch deep.

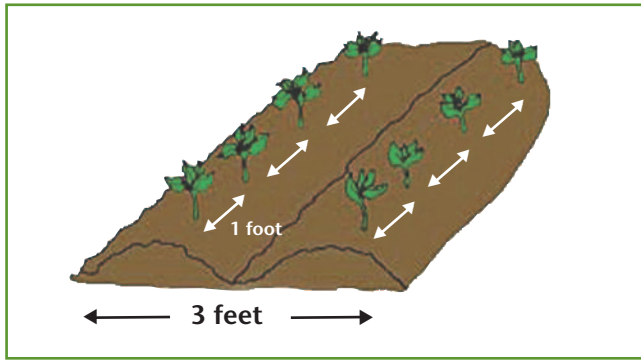


Figure 2. Okra rows should be 3 feet apart. After the plants are 3 to 4 inches tall, thin them to 1 foot between the plants.

When the okra is up and growing, thin out the plants to about 1 foot apart (Fig. 2).

Fertilizing

Before planting, use 2 to 3 pounds of fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 15-5-10 for each 100 square feet of garden area. Spread the fertilizer evenly over the area, and then mix it well into the top 3 to 4 inches of soil.

Watering

Okra will do fairly well under dry conditions. However, if you water the plants every 7 to 10 days, the yield will be higher. Sandy soils will need water more often than clay soils.

Care during the season

Cultivate around the okra plants to remove weeds and grass. To avoid damaging the okra roots, pull weeds close to the plants by hand.


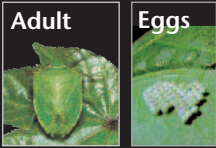
After the first harvest, apply 1 cup of garden fertilizer for each 10 feet of row.

Scatter the fertilizer evenly between the rows. Mix it lightly with the soil. Water the plants after fertilizing.

Insects

Many insecticides are available at garden centers for homeowner use. Sevin is a synthetic insecticide; organic options include sulfur and Bt-based insecticides. Sulfur has also fungicidal properties and helps control many diseases.

Before using a pesticide, read the label and always follow cautions, warnings, and directions.

Name and description		Control
 <p>Aphids</p>	Green, pink, red, or brown; 1/8 inch long; soft bodied; usually found on underside of leaves; suck plant juices	Malathion
 <p>Adult Eggs</p> <p>Stink bugs</p>	Brown, green or black; shield shaped; usually about 1/2 inch long; discharge a foul odor; suck plant juices	Sevin

Diseases

Diseases on okra are most severe in cloudy, damp weather. Check the plants daily and treat them with an approved fungicide if diseases appear. Neem oil, sulfur, and other fungicides are available for use. Always follow label directions.

Harvesting

Okra plants will produce large flowers about 2 months after planting. The okra pods will be ready to pick 3 to 4 days later.

Harvest the pods when they are 3 to 4 inches long. If the okra gets too large, it will be tough and stringy. Pick the okra every 1 to 2 days or yields will decrease (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Harvest okra when it is about 3 to 4 inches long.

Okra can be stored for 3 to 5 days in the refrigerator.

Okra that is too mature can be dried, cured, and used in flower arrangements.

Okra seed is easily saved for next season by leaving some of the last pods on the plant until they get very large. Remove them and allow them to dry. The seeds will shell easily from the pods.

Other okra plant material such as leaves and stems can be put in a compost pile.

Acknowledgments

This publication was revised from earlier versions written by B. Dean McCraw, former Professor and Extension Horticulturist, and Sam Cotner, Professor Emeritus and former Extension Horticulturist.

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Produced by AgriLife Communications, The Texas A&M System

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward G. Smith, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

Revision