

GROWING OKRA OR LADY'S FINGER



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Okra: An Introduction

OKRA is a very much desired vegetable among the home makers and the growers alike because it is one of the delicious vegetables if cooked properly and also rich in dietary fiber. Okra is cultivated throughout India for its immature pods which are used as a vegetable. Okra is cooked in several ways: sliced and stir fried; used in soups and stews; stuffed with cottage cheese or mashed potatoes or cooked with spices. Whatever be the preparation method, okra ends up as the most delicious vegetable dish on your dinner table. In some parts of the world okra seeds are dried and roasted to use as a substitute for coffee.

Medicinal Properties of Okra

Okra is believed to have a number of medicinal properties. A list of these medicinal properties is given below:

1. Okra is anti-diabetic, anti-pyretic, diuretic and anti-spasmodic
2. Okra is rich in Vitamin A, Vitamin C and Vitamin K and therefore, regular consumption of okra strengthens body's immunity and improves eye sight
3. Okra is rich in dietary fiber and act as a hunger-suppressant and is also good for relieving conditions such as constipation and gastritis
4. Okra is good for health conditions such as high cholesterol and bad liver
5. Okra is believed to be good for skin health and bone health

Origin

Okra is believed to be a native of Africa. However, now it is widely grown in all tropical, sub-tropical and temperate regions of the world as a vegetable. Okra is a woody, perennial plant. In temperate climate, okra is grown as an annual vegetable.

Taxonomy

Okra belongs to the family Malvaceae and genus *Abelmoschus* and species *esculentus*.

Varieties

Based on the growth habit and height of the plant, okra varieties are classified into three groups: Tall, Medium-Tall, and Dwarf

Growing Okra

Climate: Okra is a tropical, warm season vegetable crop and thrives well in full sun light. Okra plants require a long, warm growing season for seed production and seed germination. Okra seeds do not germinate below 20 degree Celsius. Okra plant is susceptible to frost and will not thrive during season of cold spell.

Soil: Okra can be grown in all types of soils. However, well-drained, fertile, loamy soils are the best. Optimum soil pH range is between 6 and 6.8

Propagation: Okra is propagated through seeds.

Planting: Though okra can be grown throughout the year as it is a perennial crop, generally only two crops are taken: a Summer Crop and a Rainy Season Crop. For summer crop, seeds are sown in the beginning of summer season i.e. April –May. For rainy season crop, seeds are sown at the onset of monsoon, i.e. June.

Fertilizer and irrigation Requirements

Seed Rate: For summer crop, it is 18 to 20 kg per hectare, whereas for the rainy season crop, it is 10 to 12 kg per hectare.

Field Preparation: Field should be well-prepared by ploughing and tilling the land at least two weeks before sowing seeds. 25 to 30 tons of farm yard manure or compost per hectare of land, should be incorporated with the top soil in order to enhance the soil fertility.

Fertilizer Application: In India, recommended fertilizer doses are as follows: 350 kg of superphosphate, 125 kg of muriate of potash and 300 kg of ammonium sulphate. These fertilizers should be drilled in the rows before sowing.

During second application, 300 kg of ammonium sulphate should be top-dressed; it should be done after about a month of first fertilizer application.

Irrigation: First irrigation is done just before sowing the seeds in the main field. After sowing the seeds, regular irrigation is recommended until plants get established in the field. Okra crop should be irrigated every fifth or sixth day during summer. During the rainy season, need-based irrigation is done.

Weeding: Regular weeding and hoeing is recommended.

Harvesting and Yield: Okra crop will be ready for harvest within two months of planting. Tender, immature okra fruits can be continuously harvested every second or third day from the time the first pods are formed. Most ideal time of picking fruits is one week after the opening of flowers.

Fruit yield for summer crop is 50 quintals/ha while for rainy season crop, it is 100 quintals/ha. Seeds are generally raised from the rainy season crop. Seed yield is about 12 quintals per hectare.

Pest and Disease Management in Okra

Insect-Pests: The most common insect-pests of the okra are jassids, shoot and fruit-borer and cotton boll worms. The affected shoots and young fruits should be clipped and destroyed along with the insects. Spraying recommended insecticides/pesticides may help control the insect-pests up to a good extent.

Diseases: Two most important diseases of the okra are yellow-vein mosaic virus and powdery mildew.

- **Yellow Vein Mosaic:** It is a viral disease and affects the leaves as well as the fruits. Since this disease is spread by fruit flies, controlling fruit flies will automatically control the spread of the disease.
- **Powdery Mildew:** It is a fungal disease and dusting sulphur will control this disease up to good extent.



Okra/Lady's Finger

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