

How to Plant, Grow, and Harvest Okra



Preparation

When

Okra thrives in the heat and full sun. Plant when the days become consistently warm. In Georgia, the ideal time is late April through July. The soil temperature needs to be at least 60 degrees F for germination, preferably closer to 80 degrees.

Companions

Companion plants help each other to thrive by preventing certain pests and attracting beneficial insects. Peppers and eggplant are good companions to okra.

Containers

Containers need to have drainage holes, and they need to be big enough to support the full potential growth of whatever is planted in them. You should plant okra in containers that are at least 5-10 gallons in size. Dwarf varieties of okra are best for container growing. Note that containers tend to dry out faster, so you may need to water more often. Also, nutrients in the soil leech out as excess water drains from the containers. Regularly amend your soil by adding some organic fertilizer to your mix. Use about a cup of fertilizer per 5 gallons of soil mix. Reapply about every couple of months.

Where

Okra is very adaptable and will probably grow wherever you plant it, as long as it has enough space and gets enough sun. It needs full sun and grows best in soil that is rich with organic matter. Add compost to your soil prior to planting.

How

Okra seed is notoriously slow to germinate. Soaking seeds overnight will speed up germination and may result in a higher germination rate.

Okra can be direct-seeded or transplanted, but its root system prefers to be direct-seeded. Sow seeds 1/2 to 1 inch deep, spaced approximately 18 inches apart, in rows several feet apart.

If transplanting, start seeds in trays or pots 2-3 weeks before planting outside.



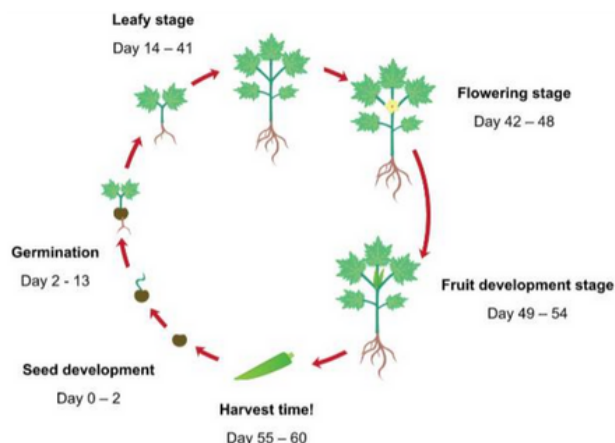
After Planting

How to Care for Okra Plants

Keep the area around your okra plants free of weeds, especially while the plants are still young. After pulling weeds, you can apply a thick layer of mulch to prevent any more weeds from growing.

When the seedlings are a few inches tall, thin them out so that they are at least 18 inches apart. Okra plants can grow to be quite large, so it's important to give them ample space to branch out and flourish.

Keep your okra plants well-watered, especially while they are flowering and producing pods.



How to Harvest Okra

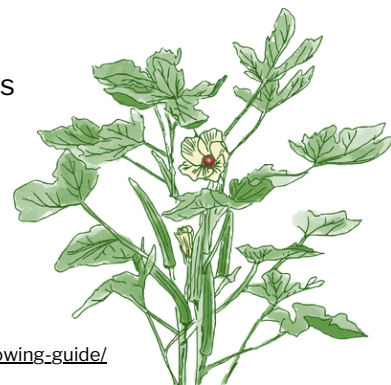
You can use a knife or scissors to cut the okra pods from the plant (students should be careful!) or you can gently snap the stem of the okra pod from the plant.

Harvest while the pods are still tender. Generally, this means at 2 to 3 inches. However, if it has been rainy (and warm), the pods will grow faster and can be longer and still tender.

Try to harvest daily, or at least every other day, in order to harvest while pods are still tender and to encourage the plant to keep producing pods.

Okra pods become woody if they're left on the plant for too many days. Remove the woody pods and save them for another use, or toss them into the compost or on the ground.

Leave the tiny pods to grow a little longer and gain more flavor.



Sources: [The Whole Okra](#) by Chris Smith | www.almanac.com/plant/okra | www.southernexposure.com/okra-growing-guide/