

# Okra Cultural Highlights: North America

## Who are the Gullah Geechee people?

The Gullah Geechee people are descendants of enslaved Africans who were concentrated on the coastal islands off of South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana. The nature of their enslavement led them to create their own culture, language, lifestyle, and traditions because they were isolated from mainland plantations, other slaves, and white farmers.

- To stay true to the authentic tradition of making okra, Gullah Geechee communities stress the importance of cooking okra dishes in the summer (when it is in season), making dishes through old-fashioned, slow cooking techniques, and passing down family recipes for generations.
- In many Gullah Geechee okra soups, enslaved people used oxtail meat rather than the more available meat at the time, pork. The reason for this was that many Gullah Geechee enslaved people came from Muslim majority areas of Africa, such as Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, and eating pork was against their religious traditions.
- **Recipes:** [Pecan Fried Okra recipe](#)

## What is Creole culture?

This is a non-Anglo Saxon culture (Western Africans, Native Americans, Caribbean Islanders, Western Europeans) that thrived in Louisiana before this French colony was sold in 1803. Creole identity was unique in that it was determined by a person's origins -- whether or not they were born in the Louisiana French colony. For enslaved people, this meant they were distinguished as being Creole only if they were born in the Louisiana French Colony. After the Civil war, many formerly enslaved people would identify as Creole to prove a racially mixed background.

- In the Creole language, okra is known as "févi". The name for the famous creole dish named "gumbo" is derived from the name for okra in the African Bantu languages.

- **Recipes:** [Chicken Gumbo](#), [Seafood Gumbo](#)



**Fun Fact: Okra is a mascot for Delta State University - "The Fighting Okra"!**

# Okra Cultural Highlights: Africa and the Middle East



## Africa

- In many West African cuisines, many parts of the okra plant are used for different meals. The sliminess and seeds are used to thicken stews; the leaves of the plant can be used to flavor soups or to be eaten on their own; the flowers and buds are also consumed.
- The word okra is derived from the word "okuru", which is the name of the plant in the Igbo language of Nigeria.
- **Recipe:** [West African Okra Stew](#)

## Middle East

- Bamia is the name for okra in many Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries.
- In Greece and Cyprus, vegetarian Bamia is eaten during fasting seasons during religious holidays such as Easter.
- In Turkey, Bamia is used as a palate cleanser during ceremonial feasts with multiple courses. Turkish Bamia has a sweet and sour taste, usually containing sugar, lemon juice, olive oil, and various spices.
- In Egypt, carvings of okra plants have been found in the tombs and temples of pharaohs. Tombs and temples were built to reflect the life of the pharaoh on earth, so that meant that their favorite foods were carved into the walls for decoration, or even mummified along with the pharaohs when they died.
  - In modern Egypt, Bamia can be found in lamb stew, with tomatoes, okra, and garlic sauce.

### What 'Okra' looks like in these areas of the World:

بامية  
(Arabic- Middle East/North  
Africa, Farsi - Iran)

kingombo or ngombo  
(Bantu languages -  
Central/Eastern Africa)

μπάμια  
(Greek- Greece)



òkùrù  
(Western africa)

dongódongó  
(Lingala- Congo region)

nhaguguzire  
(Shona - Eastern Africa)

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**Cultural Highlights**

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# Okra Cultural Highlights: Asia



## Central/South Asia

- Okra first came to India and surrounding regions around 1100 AD by Emperor Bhulokamala Someshwara III, known as “lotus of the earth.” The emperor loved okra so much that he ordered its cultivation in the great river valleys of India and China.
- **Recipes:** [Bharawa Bhindi](#), [Indian Style Okra](#)

## Southeast/East Asia

- Although okra is not a staple food in Southeastern/Eastern Asian cuisine, it can be found in a variety of dishes throughout the region:
  - Vietnam: [Canh Chua Cá dish](#) - This is a sweet and sour soup that includes okra and a variety of unique fish and vegetables found only in this region of the world.
  - Philippines: [Pinakbet dish](#) - This is a popular vegetable dish that contains lots of okra, and the name means ‘shrunk’ or ‘shriveled.’

### What 'Okra' looks like in these areas of the World:

ओकरा  
(Hindi - India)

اوبره  
(Pashto - Afghanistan)

キクイモ  
(Japanese - Japan)



秋葵  
(Chinese - China)

มะเขือมอญ  
(Thai- Thailand)

오쿠라  
(Korean - South Korea)

đâu bắp  
(Vietnamese - Vietnam)

