

Okra

Okra recipes and Information

Okra comes from a large vegetable plant thought to be of African origin, and it was brought to the United States three centuries ago by African slaves. The word, derived from the West African *nkruma*, was in use by the late 1700s. Grown in tropical and warm temperate climates, it is in the same plant family as hibiscus and cotton.

Okra is usually available fresh year-round in the South, and from May to October in many other areas. You can also find okra frozen, pickled, and canned, and in some regions you might find frozen breaded okra for deep frying. When buying fresh okra, look for young pods free of bruises, tender but not soft, and no more than 4 inches long. Okra may be stored in the refrigerator in a paper bag or wrapped in a paper towel in a perforated plastic bag for 2 to 3 days, or it may be frozen for up to 12 months after blanching whole for 2 minutes. Cooked okra can be stored (tightly covered) in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days.

When cut, okra releases a sticky substance with thickening properties, often used in soups and stews. Gumbos, Brunswick stew, and pilius are some well-known dishes which frequently use okra.

Okra can be served raw, marinated in salads or cooked on its own, and goes well with tomatoes, onions, corn, peppers, and eggplant. Whole, fresh okra pods also make excellent pickles. Its mild flavor can be compared to eggplant, though the texture is somewhat unusual.

How To Cook And Eat Crawfish

1. Boil or order three to five pounds (per person) of fresh boiled crawfish. You can purchase prepared seasoned mixes for boiling the crawfish with directions, if available in your area.

2. (Optional) Put on a special bib to protect clothing. (This allows a little more freedom with the crawfish.)

Note: Here in Louisiana we usually add whole potatoes, onions, and corn along with crawfish. We place newspapers and garbage bags on a big table, and once these are all done, we just dump everything on the table, and everyone just serves themselves!

3. Take a deep breath to enjoy the fullness of the aroma.

4. Grab the nearest crawfish off the pile.

5. Hold the crawfish with your left hand and gently twist off the tail.

6. Take the head and suck the hot, spicy juices out of it.

7. Squeeze your thumb and forefinger at the sides of the top of the tail, causing the shell to break.

8. Remove the meat and eat. Go to step 4 and repeat as *needed*

Fried Okra

Prep Time:	20 min	Level:	Serves:
Inactive Prep Time:	-	Intermediate	6 to 8 servings
Cook Time:	10 min		

Ingredients

- 6 cups oil, for frying
- 1/2 cup cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons House Seasoning, recipe follows
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 pounds fresh okra, sliced 1/2-inch thick *Note - use Frozen if out of season*
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- *optional → 1 pound peeled crawfish tails*

Directions

Heat oil in a large, heavy-bottomed skillet to 350 degrees F. (You may not need to use this much oil; do not fill the pan more than halfway up the sides with oil.)

In a medium bowl, combine cornmeal, flour, House Seasoning, and cayenne pepper. Dip okra in buttermilk and then dredge in cornmeal-flour mixture to coat well. Carefully add okra to the hot oil, in batches as needed, and cook until golden brown. Remove from oil, drain on paper towels, and then serve immediately.

House Seasoning:

- 1 cup salt
- 1/4 cup black pepper
- 1/4 cup garlic powder

Yield: 1 1/2 cups

Mix ingredients together and store in an airtight container for up to 6 months.

How to Bread Frozen Okra for Frying

Instructions

Difficulty: Moderately Easy

1. Remove the okra from the freezer and pour into a strainer, and rinse under cold running water. This will help separate any stems or inedible leaves that might have found their way into the bag. Allow all the water to drain off before placing the cleaned okra into a large bowl.
2. Add buttermilk to the bowl, taking care to cover the okra completely. Transfer the bowl to the refrigerator, and allow it to rest for at least an hour.
3. Place the flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper in the remaining bowl, stirring gently to combine. You can add other seasonings, such as onion powder or garlic powder, to add more flavor to the coating.
4. Remove the okra from the refrigerator, and strain off the buttermilk, allowing the okra to rest in the strainer for at least 10 minutes to remove as much liquid as possible. The buttermilk helps the breading stick to the frozen okra without making it too heavy.
5. Move the okra a handful at a time to the cornmeal mixture, turning it gently with your hands to coat each piece thoroughly. Be careful not to add the okra if there is too much buttermilk still clinging to it, or the cornmeal mixture will turn into a gummy pile in the bottom of the bowl.
6. To fry the breaded okra, fill the frying pan with 2 or 3 inches of peanut oil, and clip the thermometer to the side of the pan. Set the pan on the stove at medium heat. Watch the thermometer closely, and allow the oil temperature to reach 350 degrees before adding the okra.
7. Set the okra gently in the hot oil one small batch at a time. Turn the okra with a wire kitchen spider until each piece is golden brown, moving each piece to a plate lined with paper towels to drain off excess oil. Repeat the frying process until you have fried the entire bowl of okra.

Things You'll Need:

Bagged frozen okra

Strainer

1 cup buttermilk

2 large bowls

1/2 cup cornmeal

1/4 cup flour

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper

Stove

Deep frying pan

Peanut oil

Thermometer for deep fat frying

Wire kitchen spider

Tips & Warnings

- Always check the expiration date on okra. Frozen okra lasts longer than fresh okra, but it still can spoil if left in your freezer too long.
- Never leave hot oil unattended. It can easily get too hot and cause a fire if not closely monitored.

Mardi Gras King Cake

Crown your Mardi Gras party with this festive brioche

No Mardi Gras party is complete without King Cake — the colorful braided brioche that satisfies the sweet tooth. But even more important is what's hidden in the dough, because whoever gets a slice with a miniature plastic baby inside must supply the next King Cake — among other duties.

"I've heard whoever gets the baby has to do the dishes, or people put money into a pool and whoever gets the baby wins the pot," says David Haydel, owner of Haydel's Bakery in New Orleans, which produces 60,000 King Cakes each year for Mardi Gras revelers around the world. "Traditionally it's used to select the king and queen of the Mardi Gras krewe." Krewes are clubs that host Mardi Gras balls and parade elaborate floats down New Orleans streets.

If a man finds the prize in the King Cake, he's named king of the krewe's ball and chooses his queen. If a woman finds it, it's lady's choice. Typically, the queen provides the place for the next party, and the king provides the food. This tradition is said to have begun with the 1870 ball of the Twelfth Night Revelers in New Orleans, when one gold and several silver beans were hidden in King Cakes to determine the queen of the ball and her maids-in-waiting.

Over the years, beans have been replaced by gold coins, jewelry and even nuts. Because they were easy to accidentally swallow, beans fell out of favor, and "people would just eat the pecans," explains Haydel, so bakers turned to miniature plastic babies.

In keeping with the holiday, the miniature plastic babies are a symbol for the baby Jesus. The Mardi Gras season kicks off with Epiphany, the commemoration of the night the Three Kings brought gifts to the baby Jesus. The celebration continues through Fat Tuesday and ends with Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten fast.

Most locals buy ready-made cakes, though the recipe is simply flour, eggs, butter, yeast and milk or water. The dough can be lightly spiced with cinnamon, nutmeg and citrus zest, or filled with cream cheese and fruit. Then it's braided into an oval ring to represent a crown and decorated with fondant icing, colored sugar and candies in the Mardi Gras colors: gold for power, green for faith and purple for justice.

Once reserved for Fridays during Mardi Gras, King Cake parties now take place every day during the height of the celebratory period.