



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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ROASTED OKRA EASY, TASTY ALTERNATIVE TO FRIED

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Okra is an essential ingredient of Southern cuisine. Okra is crucial in gumbo, for instance, that if okra is left out, the remaining ingredients no longer qualify as gumbo. The very word for okra, in the West African countries from which this vegetable originated, is ‘gambo’.

Gumbo is a complicated and time-consuming dish, however, so most Southerners traditionally enjoy their okra breaded and fried in a skillet. An incredibly easy and healthy alternative, not to mention crispy and flavorful, is roasted okra. Some fresh, tender okra pods, some olive oil, salt and pepper and you have all the best of okra without any of the mess, fuss or extra calories of other cooking methods.

Okra is a member of the Mallow family, related to cotton, hibiscus and hollyhock, cultivated for its edible green seed pod. It is actually a tall – about six feet-- annual tropical herb. A seed pod is three to 10 inches long, tapering, usually with ribs down its length. Tender, unripe seed pods are used as a vegetable, and have a unique texture and bold flavor.

Okra is a good source of vitamin C and A, as well as B complex vitamins, iron and calcium. It is low in calories, a good source of dietary fiber, and is fat-free. Increased interest in American regional foods has brought okra renewed attention and new serving methods.

If you go to your local farmers market or farm for your okra, you’ll find the picked pods sitting loose in baskets. That way, the choice is yours – just scoop up the perfect size, quality and quantity you’re looking for.

Choose young, tender but firm pods, generally no bigger than the length of your palm. They should be a rich, green color. Avoid pods that are dull and dry looking, blemished or limp. Mature okra is used to make rope and paper, so avoid old, woody pods!

Store okra in a paper bag in the warmest part of refrigerator, as temperatures below 45 degrees can damage okra. It does not store well, so use within two or three days at most.

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Do not wash okra until you're ready to use it, or it will become slimy. When preparing it, remember that the more times it's cut, the slimier it will seem.

It's a fun to go to a farmers market and bring home ingredients you know are local and freshly picked. For a list of Tennessee farmers markets, farms or for more recipes featuring Tennessee farm products, visit www.picktnproducts.org.

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Roasted Okra

Yield: 4 servings

25 fresh okra pods
2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Slice the okra into 1/2-inch slices and place on a jellyroll pan. Sprinkle evenly with the oil, salt and pepper. Roast 25 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.