

Harvest

Harvest okra when pods are young which is soon after flower petals fall. To remove pods cleanly, cut them from the plant rather than trying to break them off. Pruning shears work well for this. Pods should be 2 - 3 inches in length. From blossom to edible pod is approximately 5 days in hot weather. Picking pods encourages the production of more. Old pods become tough, woody and inedible. Once okra is producing pods, pick every 3 days if they are the correct size. Contact with the plant can cause some people to develop a skin rash.

Okra plants have short hairs that can irritate the skin Use gloves and wear long sleeves. Touching the plant after the dew has dried in the morning will lessen this possibility.

For more information and other helpful educational materials, contact:

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Green Tips

Plant and Grow Guides

Lima Beans and Okra (GT 108)

Long, Hot Summers

Lima beans and okra are warm season vegetables that grow best in hot weather and full sun. In Michigan, some summers may be better than others for these two vegetables. There are ways of giving these vegetables more of an advantage in areas that are not reliably hot every growing season. Both grow very well in southern states and are staples of many southern gardens.



Planting Dates

Lima beans and okra require a long growing season. Lima beans require approximately 65 to 75 days before beans are ready to harvest. Okra requires 50 to 65 days. The time begins when the plants emerge, not at the time of planting. Both will be delayed by cool, wet weather. These vegetables need a soil temperature above 65 degrees for seeds to germinate. Their growing season may be shortened by early frosts.

Soil

Both vegetables will do best in a sandy soil with good drainage. For heavier soils, mix in compost or composted manure to loosen compaction. Both can handle a wide range of soil pH, but 6.5 will work well for both.

LIMA BEANS

Lima beans are also known as butter beans in the south, have similar growing requirements to snap beans but are more sensitive to cold soils and have a longer growing season at approximately 4 months.

Planting

- Sow seeds 2 - 4 inches apart and 1 - 2 inches deep. Leave 1 ½ to 2 feet between rows. Thin the seedlings to 3 - 4 inches apart.
- Pole varieties may be planted in rows like bush varieties or in hills (groups of seeds, not mounds). Plant 6 seeds in each hill and thin to 2 - 3 plants. Pole varieties must be supported with a fence or several poles set like a teepee. Tie poles at the top.
- Small-seeded lima beans mature sooner than large-seeded ones.
- Bush varieties need no support and mature fasture, but pole varieties produce more beans.

Fertilizer

Use your soil test recommendation or work in 2 pounds of 5-20-20 per 100 square feet of soil before planting. Too much nitrogen fertilizer at the time of planting can inhibit seeds from germinating. Avoid additional nitrogen fertilization because beans are able to get nitrogen from the air. Use all the phosphorus and potassium recommended by your soil test.

Weeds

Cultivate lightly around plants or use black plastic mulch. It will help to keep the soil warm and moist.

Water

Water when the soil is dry.

Harvest

Pick pods when seeds in the pod feel firm, defined and plump, but before the pods turn yellow. Overly mature beans are starchy and tasteless. For dry beans, let the pods dry on the plant. Beans are eaten, pods are not.



OKRA

Okra is a member of the hibiscus family and has attractive yellow or pinkish flowers. In the south, okra is often called gumbo. Gumbo can also be a dish that uses okra, tomatoes and other stewed vegetables. It can be used as a thickener in soups and stews. It is one of the oldest cultivated vegetables. Plants grow best when the air temperature is 70-85 degrees F. Plants will grow 4 - 7 feet in height, depending on weather and variety. There are newer dwarf varieties of okra that will grow to 2 - 3 feet in height.

Planting

- Plant seeds ½ inch deep. Thin the seedlings to 12 - 15 inches apart. Leave 2 - 2 ½ feet between rows.
- If planting in the garden directly, plant after danger of frost has passed.
- Seeds can also be started indoors in individual containers.

Plants do not tolerate root disturbances so transplant carefully. Start 6 - 8 weeks before transplanting outside.

Fertilizer

Use your soil test recommendation or before planting, mix in 2 pounds of 5-20-20 per 100 square feet of area. Apply a high nitrogen fertilizer (21-0-0 or 46-0-0) when the pods begin to form in two months. Fertilizer should be sprinkled on the soil about four inches from the plants and shallowly worked in. Do not disturb the roots.

Weeds

Cultivate shallowly or mulch with black plastic. The plastic will keep the soil warm and moist. If tilling or hoeing between rows or around the plants, do not disturb the roots.

Water

Water plants during dry periods but not keep the soil wet.

