

Okra in Mississippi

Okra is a hot-weather vegetable. Most varieties make a large plant.



Soils

Okra will grow in most soil types in Mississippi, but loam and sandy loam soils produce the highest yields. Okra will grow with a soil pH of 5.7 to 6.5, but a pH between 6.0 and 6.5 is optimum.

Varieties

Fresh Market: Clemson Spineless, Cajun Delight, North and South, and Annie Oakley II. Processing varieties are specified by the processor.

Planting Dates

Okra is a hot-weather crop. Sow seed between April 15 and June 1, when soil temperatures are between 70 and 95 °F. You can plant as late as July 1, but the harvest season will be short and the yield lower.

Spacing

An ideal stand is one plant for every foot of row, on two rows 3 to 4 feet apart with 5 to 7 feet between rows. This is similar to skip-row planting patterns and is easier to harvest than the conventional 38- to 42-inch row spacings, but it does give a lower yield. Annie Oakley II is a dwarf okra that produces compact plants for closer spacing.

Seed Rate

Conventional drill-type seeders can use as much as 10 pounds per acre, while precision seeders use as little as 2 pounds.

Fertilizer

Apply fertilizer according to soil test results. Apply lime three months before planting. Broadcast fertilizer before planting, or band it below and to the side of each row. Sidedress with nitrogen according to soil type, rainfall, and crop growth. One application of 33 pounds of nitrogen may be sufficient on fine-textured soils. Two or three applications may be required on sandy soils. Too much nitrogen can cause excessive stalk growth.

Irrigation

Maximum yields of quality okra depend on rapid continuous growth of the plants. Be sure to maintain adequate soil moisture with supplemental irrigation. Signs of water stress are slowing of plant growth, wilting at midday, and few blooms developing into pods.

Weed Control

Trifluralin (Treflan, Trilin) or metolachlor (Dual) can be used preplant incorporated to control grass seedlings and some small-seeded broadleaves.

Nematodes

Okra is highly susceptible to nematodes. Have the soil tested for nematodes, and treat according to recommendations listed in Extension Publication 554.

Disease Control

Several diseases can cause problems. Pod rot is a bearded fungus growing on the pod. It occurs on pods that were not pollinated sufficiently. Remove one or two upper leaves and tall weeds to improve sunlight and air circulation.

Southern blight is a white mold at the base of the stem near the soil line. Plant okra behind corn or other grass crop; deep plow to cover old crop residue.

Verticillium wilt causes, okra plants to yellow, wilt, and usually die. Control with crop rotation.

Insect Control

Common insect problems include aphids, ants, corn earworms, and stink bugs. Control these insects with carbaryl (Sevin). Consult Extension Publication 554 for complete details.

Harvesting

Under ideal conditions, first harvest of okra is 55 to 60 days after planting. Harvest three times weekly, when pods are 2 to 3 inches long, by cutting or snapping pods. Handle okra carefully since it discolors quickly when bruised. Do not wet okra after harvest. Pack in clean hampers, and place in the shade as soon as possible.

Grading

Discard curved or malformed okra pods. Grade according to buyers' demands. Most buyers will pay more for "Fancy" grade okra, which consists of pods 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches long.

Storage

Okra can be stored at 50 °F for 7 to 10 days. Temperatures below 50 °F will cause injury. Keep humidity high to prevent wilting, but do not mist.

Yield

Okra yields in Mississippi range from 4 to 7 tons per acre, or 200 to 400 bushels.

Costs

Preharvest	\$ 180
Harvest and handling	\$ 1,820
Total	\$ 2,000

Prices

Prices for okra vary between \$0.20 and \$0.70 a pound for fresh-market okra. Processing okra brings between \$0.08 and \$0.12 a pound.



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