

Southern Stewed Okra & Tomatoes



No one truly knows where okra first came from. Scientists believe the growing of the okra plant began as early as 12th century BC in Ethiopia. The plant most likely made it to the Southern United States with the beginnings of the slave trade in the 1500s.

The farming of the okra plant on Southern soil allowed ancient Western African culinary and agricultural traditions to continue. "Gumbo" is Swahili for okra. The plant lends its unique texture to various soups and stews as the roux – providing thickness to a combination of vegetables and proteins. Variations of these ancient dishes became Louisiana's roux gumbo, South Carolina and Georgia's roux-less gumbo, and Maryland's crab gumbo. Other dishes like fried and stewed okra with tomatoes soon became a hallmark of African American and Southern cuisine.

INGREDIENTS *MAKES 8 SIDE SERVINGS*

- 4 thick slices of bacon, cut into pieces
- 1 medium/large onion, diced
- 1 (28 oz.) can diced tomatoes with juice (or fresh!)
- 1.5-2 lbs. fresh okra, sliced
- 2 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- Salt to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder (or substitute fresh minced garlic)
- *optional* 1/2 teaspoon Creole seasoning

DIRECTIONS

1. Begin by sautéing the bacon pieces until browned over medium heat. Remove the cooked bacon and reserve for garnish later.
2. In the same pan, add the diced onion to the bacon fat rendered and sauté for 2-3 minutes until softened.
3. Next, add in the canned diced tomatoes and the sliced okra. Stir to combine.
4. Add the stock and seasonings. Stir to combine.
5. Bring to a simmer. Cover and cook for 20-30 minutes. Make sure to not overcook.
6. Serve hot topped with bacon pieces as a side dish or topped over cooked rice.
7. Enjoy!

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