

Ochra Soup

The Virginia Housewife Or, Methodical Cook by Mary Randolph, 1841

Background

Okra originated in Africa, in the region of present day Ethiopia. It was transported from Ethiopia to North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, Arabia, and India, though how and when are unknown. One of the earliest known accounts is by a Spanish Moor who visited Egypt in 1216. He described the plant and stated the pods were eaten while young and tender with meal. It was common and popular in the French cookery of Louisiana, leading to the assumption it was introduced by the French colonists of Louisiana in the early 1700's. It is popular in the South, often fried with cornmeal, or used in soups and stews. It is important in many gumbo recipes. Gumbo is a word sometimes used to refer to the okra itself, and is thought to be a corruption of a Portuguese corruption, *quingombo*, of the African, *quillobo*, the native name for the plant in the Congo and Angola area of Africa. A member of the Malvaceae family which includes cotton, cacao, hibiscus, and mallow.

Original Receipt

Get two double handfuls of young ochra, wash and slice it thin, add two onions chopped fine, put it into a gallon of water at a very early hour in an earthen pipkin, or very nice iron pot; must be kept steadily simmering, but not boiling: put in pepper and salt. At 12 o'clock, put in a handful of Lima beans; at half-past one o'clock, add three young cimlins cleaned and cut in small pieces, a fowl, or knuckle of veal, a bit of bacon or pork that has been boiled, and six tomatoes, with the skin taken off; when nearly done, thicken with a spoonful of butter, mixed with one of flour. Have rice boiled up to eat with it.

Ingredients

Amount

Okra	Two handfuls
Onions	Two
Water	A gallon or so
Pepper & Salt	To taste
Lima beans	One handful
Cimlin (summer squash)	Three
Tomatoes	Six
Chicken, veal, or pork	A bit
Butter & Flour	One spoonful each
Rice	--