PLANT FACT SHEET

Abelmoschus esculentus (L.) Moench.

GENUS *Abelmoschus* **FAMILY** Malvaceae

COMMON NAMES Okra, Lady's fingers

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Pods, Flowers, Seeds, Seeds - coffee, Leaves, Vegetable

Pods are eaten cooked. They are slimy, but less so if fried. They are also less sticky if a little lemon is added.
Dried powdered seeds can be used in soups. It thickens the soup. They can also be pickled.
Young leaves can be eaten cooked. They can be dried and stored.
Flowers can also be eaten.
Okra is frozen and canned.
The seeds are roasted and used as a coffee substitute.

DESCRIPTION

A tropical annual herb. It grows erect, often with hairy stems. It mostly grows about 1 m tall but can be 3.5 m tall. It becomes woody at the base. The leaves have long stalks up to 30 cm long. Leaves vary in shape but are roughly heart shaped with lobes and teeth along the edge. Upper leaves are more deeply divided than lower ones. The flowers are yellow with red hearts. The fruits are green, long and ribbed. They have 5-7 ribs. They are 7.5-15 cm long. The seeds are 4-5 mm across. They are round and dark green. Many varieties exist.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It suits the hot humid tropical lowlands but is unsuited to the highlands. It cannot tolerate drought. It is very sensitive to frost. It can grow in salty soils. They grow best where temperatures are between 20-36°C. It can grow well in dry climates with irrigation. It suits hot humid environments. It does best on well drained well manured soils but will grow on many soils. A pH or 5.5-7.0 is best. It suits plant hardiness zones 8-12. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

They are grown from seeds. Seeds are easy to collect. They need high temperatures for germination (over 20°C) and a sunny position. Often seeds are soaked for 24 hours before sowing to give quick germination. Seeds are sown 1.5-2.5 cm deep with 2-3 seeds per hole. Later these are thinned out to one plant. Seeds can be sown in nurseries and plants transplanted. Pinching out the tops of plants when 30 cm high encourages branching. To select seed of a particular variety seed plants must be separated 400 m from other varieties. A spacing of about

90 x 45 cm is suitable. About 8-10 kg of seed are required for one hectare. Most kinds respond to fertiliser. Seeds do not breed true and can cross with other kinds of okra growing nearby. This is not normally a problem but simply means plants and fruit are not all the same.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Plants keep producing if the fruits are harvested regularly. Plants are ready to harvest 8-10 weeks after sowing. Seed yields of 500-800 kg per hectare are recorded. Pod yields of 4-6 tons per hectare occur. For young pods it takes 2-4 months from sowing. Pods develop 5-10 days after flowering. Pod harvests can continue for 1-2 months. Leaving pods on the plants stops new pods developing.

NOTES

There are about 15 Abelmoschus species. They are tropical and subtropical. It is rich in folates. Fruit are high in folates 109µg/100.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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