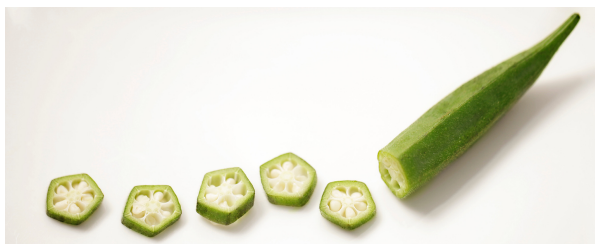


# *Eating Local and Seasonal: Asian Vegetables - Part 1*

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**An increasing number of vegetables native to other countries are being grown in Ontario. Get to know some of these locally grown vegetables that originate from Asia. You can find these vegetables during the months of June to November in most Asian supermarkets.**

**Okra** is a common ingredient found in South Asian cuisine. They are the most tender when harvested as a young plant. Okra has green skin and white spongy flesh inside with lots of white seeds that can all be eaten. One of the most distinct features of okra is the sap that gives it a gelatinous texture. Okra is often found in soups, stews, or stir-fried with spices.



Another similar (although unrelated) vegetable called **Chinese Okra** is also grown in Ontario. It has a similar shape as Okra, but is much bigger in size, growing up to 30-40 cm long. The green skin is usually removed before cooking. Its white spongy flesh has a subtle sweet flavour and is great at absorbing flavours, making it ideal for stir-fries, sabzis (an Indian cooked vegetable dish) and soups.

**Fun Fact:** Chinese Okra is also known as the luffa plant. When the plant matures, the flesh dries up and the fibres remain, creating what we know as the loofah sponge!

**Bitter Melon** also has two varieties that can be found in Ontario. **Chinese bitter melons** are about 15-30 cm long. They have light green skin that is smooth with ridges that run lengthwise. Before cooking, the white interior with the seeds should be removed. Salting the bitter melon to draw water out followed by blanching before consuming or further cooking can help tone down the bitter flavours. In Chinese cuisine, the vegetable is used in a number of ways including stir-frying, stuffing, sautéing, and braising.



**Indian bitter melon** (also called bitter gourds) are about 10-25 cm long with a more pointed end. Its skin is a darker green, thicker and bumpier than the Chinese variety. The preparation steps for cooking is similar. In Indian cuisine, bitter melon is used for frying, boiling, sautéing, and added into curries, soups or stews.

Sources: 1. Image by Pietro Jeng on Pexels. 2. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 1998. Asian Vegetables Grown in Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/98-033.htm#okra> on July 30, 2021.



## *Grilled Okra*

Recipe by Molly Watson from The Spruce Eats  
(<https://www.thespruceeats.com/grilled-okra-2216481>)

Photo by furkanfdemir from Pexels

Makes 4 servings

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 lb Okra (pods big enough to sit on top of cooking grate without falling through)
- 1 tbsp Oil
- Salt to taste
- Optional: lemon juice

### **Directions:**

1. Prepare the grill on high heat.
2. While the grill heats, trim off and discard the stems from the okra pods.
3. Place the okra in a large bowl. Drizzle with oil and toss to coat thoroughly.
4. Place the okra on the grill. Close the grill and cover until the okra's green colour heightens and grill marks or charred edges appear, about 4-5 minutes.
5. Turn the okra over and cook until slightly charred or brown on the other side.
6. Remove the okra from the grill. Sprinkle with salt and spritz with lemon juice if desired.

### **Other Serving Ideas:**

- Serve on a grilled vegetable platter along with other seasonal vegetables
- Swap lemon juice with balsamic vinegar
- Add a dash of cayenne to the oil in step 3 for a spicy kick