Okra and Greens

Okra is a vegetable that is extremely popular in African cookery. It is often added into soups and needs no special preparations besides washing, topping, tailing and cutting up. The name 'okra' probably derives from one of the Niger-Congo group of languages (the name for okra in the Twi language is 'nkuruma'). The term okra was in use in English by the late 18th century.

Okra probably originated somewhere around Ethiopia, and was cultivated by the ancient Egyptians by the 12th century B.C. Its cultivation spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The seed pods were eaten cooked, and the seeds were toasted and ground, used as a coffee substitute and still is today.

Okra came to the U.S. in the 1700s, probably brought by slaves from West Africa. In Louisiana, the Créoles learned from slaves the use of okra (gumbo) to thicken soups and it is now an essential in Créole Gumbo.

Today okra is popular in Africa, the Middle East, Greece, Turkey, India, the Caribbean, South America and the Southern U.S. It is not a very common vegetable in most European countries, except for Greece and parts of Turkey.