

Fried Okra

Fried okra is a classic for a good reason. A light cornmeal coating on the pods and a quick dunk in hot oil make this fried okra crispy, a wee bit crunchy, and completely delicious. Some people chop the okra first, creating bite-size snacks almost like popcorn. To keep slime at an absolute minimum, leave the pods whole. Bonus: It's also less work. This recipe works either way.

Fried okra is one of the tastiest, most crave-able treats I know. Just coat okra with beaten egg and then seasoned corn meal, corn flour, or semolina (sure, some people use flour instead, but I like the extra crunch from corn meal). I like to fry the pods whole, but there's nothing wrong with cutting the okra into bite-size pieces first to fry up into popcorn-like snacks. In either case, serve them plain, or offer a ranch dressing for dipping.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound okra
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- 2 eggs
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- 1 1/2 cup corn meal, corn flour, or semolina
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- 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt, plus more for sprinkling, if you like
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- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
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- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne (optional)
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- Vegetable or canola oil for frying

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Trim the stem ends off the okra pods. Cut the pods into bite-size pieces, if you like. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl beat the eggs with 2 tablespoons water. Beat them well so the mixture is of a uniform, watery consistency. Set aside.
3. In a second large bowl, combine the corn meal, salt, and peppers. Set aside.
4. In a large heavy pot, heat at least half an inch of oil to 350°F to 375°F (measure with a thermometer, or test it by dipping a piece of bread or the handle of a wooden spoon into the oil - it should sizzle immediately and steadily, if it doesn't sizzle it's not high enough and if it bubbles up violently it is too hot).
5. While the oil heats, put the okra in the egg and toss it to thoroughly and completely coat the pods. Lift the okra out, letting as much excess egg drip off as possible (you can also simply strain it in a colander, if you prefer).
6. Working in batches of 4 or 5 pods, use one hand to put the egg-coated okra in the corn meal and the other hand to toss it to coat it completely with the corn meal mixture. Note that you're using one hand to touch the wet okra and one hand to touch the dry corn meal. Put the coated okra on a plate or baking sheet. Repeat with remaining okra pods.
7. Fry the coated okra in batches - the pods should be in a single layer and they shouldn't touch - until the coating turns brown and crispy (and the okra is tender inside). Use tongs or a slotted spoon to transfer the cooked okra to a layer of paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining okra. Serve fried okra hot, sprinkled with additional salt, if you like (I sure do!).