

باميا بمشمش *Bamia b'Mishmosh*

OKRA WITH PRUNES AND APRICOTS IN TAMARIND SAUCE

In the Middle East, okra is also known as ladies' fingers because of its dainty shape. Okra is extremely popular in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, where it is much smaller and more flavorful than okra grown in the West. It has a lot of small seeds and a very glutinous texture, which can be lessened considerably by soaking it in a saltwater–lemon juice solution before cooking. Small okras have small seeds and are not as tough and stringy as the larger variety. Therefore, try to buy the smallest fresh okra you can find, or buy frozen Egyptian baby okra from a Middle Eastern grocery. Before sautéing, rinse the okra quickly, so that it does not absorb too much water.

1 pound fresh small okra, stems trimmed, or frozen Egyptian baby okra (about 2 cups)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

4 garlic cloves, chopped (about 2 teaspoons)

1 tablespoon tomato paste

3 tablespoons *ou'* (tamarind concentrate, page 41), homemade or store-bought

Juice of 1 lemon (about 3 tablespoons)

1 teaspoon kosher salt

½ cup dried apricots

½ cup pitted prunes

1. In a medium saucepan, gently sauté the okra in the vegetable oil over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes.

2. Add the garlic and sauté until the okra is lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes. To prevent the okra from emitting its characteristic starchy, mucilaginous liquid, do not stir with a spoon; rather, shake the pot occasionally as it cooks.

3. Dollop the tomato paste and *ou'* over the okra. Add 1 cup water, the lemon juice, and salt. Cover and simmer over low heat for 30 minutes, then add the apricots and prunes. Cook for 30 minutes more until okra is crisp-tender, not mushy.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings