

# How to Design an Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) Wreath



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Most farmers and gardeners think of okra as a vegetable crop, abundantly produced during the hot summer days. Okra is traditionally used in soups and stews and makes a great side dish when breaded and fried. However, the fruits, particularly when dried, are attractive and can be used in floral design. During the drying process, they take on interesting patterns and subtle color variations.

Fresh okra pods can be detached and used in arrangements, or they can be left on the stem for larger floral displays. This publication focuses on okra production and how to use the dried pods in a unique wreath shape. Such wreaths can be created and sold on the farm, at markets, to retailers, and to wholesale florists.

## PRODUCTION

Okra is best grown in full sun in well-drained soil that has been spaded/turned to an 8- to 10-inch depth. Mix a 10-10-10 or 15-5-10 fertilizer into the soil before sowing the seeds. For optimal performance, the rate should be based on a soil test. Sow the seeds about 1 inch deep and 2 inches apart a few weeks after the danger of frost has passed. After germination, thin the seedlings to 1-foot spacing. Okra will tolerate dry conditions, but weekly watering can increase pod yields. Remove weeds by hand or use a cultivator, taking care to avoid damaging the okra roots.

Okra plants flower in about 2 months. Their pods grow quickly after flowering, taking only 3 to 4 days to mature. Harvest the pods when they have grown to about 4 inches long to match those used in this project. Regular harvesting and side-dressing the plants with fertilizer will promote more flower and pod production.

## POSTHARVEST AND HANDLING

Place harvested okra pods in an area where they will stay dry. Keep space between the pods so that they dehydrate efficiently. Once they are fully dried, they can be stored in paper or mesh bags.



Harvested okra stems with attached fruit drying in a garage.



Apply polyurethane spray outdoors in a well-ventilated space.



Store dried okra pods in paper bags.

## MATERIALS

You will need 60 to 65 dried okra pods for this wreath project. In addition, you will need the following supplies and tools:

- 14-inch wire wreath form; the flat forms are best, but the curved type can be used
- Clear polyurethane spray in a matte or semigloss finish
- Floral wire, #22–24 gauge
- Glue gun and glue sticks or hot glue pot and bulk glue chips
- Ice pick, large needle, or drill with a narrow bit
- Raffia or other decorative ribbon
- Scissors
- Wire cutter



Necessary tools include (clockwise from upper left) a hot glue pot or a hot glue gun, glue chips or sticks, drill, pruners, scissors, wire cutters, wire, and a large needle.



Floral supplies include raffia and a wire wreath frame.



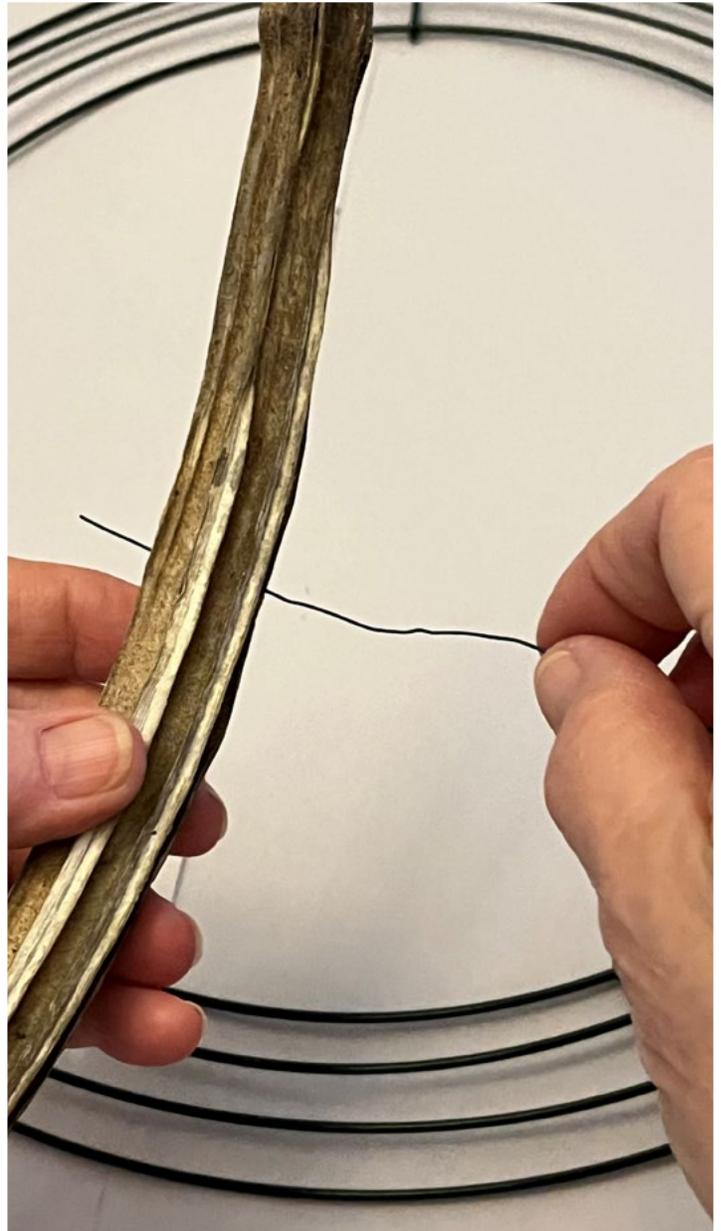
Floral wire is sold in cut packs and on spools or paddles. If yours is on a spool or paddle, cut it to 6-inch lengths in preparation for mounting the pods to the wire wreath frame.

## CONSTRUCTION

Gather end-of-season okra that is too large or spiny for consumption. Harvest the pods and dry them in an open space with plenty of air circulation. You can also dry the entire stalks in similar conditions. Once they are dried, store the extra okra pods in paper bags. If desired, coat the pods with polyurethane spray before constructing the wreath to keep them from absorbing moisture and harboring mold.



Drill small holes into each okra pod so they can be wired to the wreath frame. Alternatively, you can pierce each pod with a large needle or an ice pick.



Thread a 6-inch floral wire through the drilled hole.



Wire the pod to the wreath frame. Twist the wire around the heavier frame wires. Bend the sharp ends of the floral wire back toward the okra pods on the front side of the wreath. This will help prevent wires from scratching the door's finish or other display surfaces.



Using the longest okra pods, make the first placements in a radial, five-pointed-star pattern.



Continue filling in the pattern with wired pods. Keep the okra pod stem ends oriented to the center of the wreath.



Once the pattern is full, switch to gluing the loose, unwired pods in place. Glue in long and medium-length pods to fill the spaces and stabilize the overall design. Be sure to apply pressure to each glued pod for about 30 seconds to make sure the glue adheres to nearby pods and the wreath frame.



Continue gluing the loose okra pods following the circular shape of the wreath, layering the longest pods on the bottom and gradually adding the medium to short ones to the middle and upper layers. As the okra becomes fuller in the wreath, use smaller pods to cover areas of hardened glue.



When the wreath is finished, place a floral wire hook on the top of the wreath for hanging. For added resilience, spray additional coats of polyurethane sealant on each side of the wreath. Add a ribbon bow if desired. We wired small bunches of natural raffia to the frame for a beautiful, rustic look.

## REFERENCES

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