

Virginia Zoo Gardens

# African Village



**Come see the animals in our gardens!**



Norfolk, Virginia meets Botswana in the Okavango Delta exhibit at the Virginia Zoo. Visitors are immersed in the zoological, botanical, and cultural world of western Africa. The Okavango Delta exhibit challenges the Zoo horticulture department to be realistic.

If this exhibit represents Africa, then why do so many plants in the African Village Garden and the Okavango Delta Exhibit look familiar? The answer lies in the rich heritage established by African Americans in the United States.

Southern culture and agriculture reflect a diversity that would not be possible without the contributions of centuries of shared lives. The compatible climate allows African favorites such as okra, peanuts, and yams to grow here and to become economically important crops.

The African Village Garden contains a sampling of vegetables, flowers, and herbs from several African countries as well as some of their American counterparts. Look for odd eggplants with ruffled green or orange fruit, HOT chili peppers (round peppers, yellow peppers, red peppers, and striped peppers), white-fleshed watermelons, gourds covered in warts, beans, onions, tomatoes, and more.

Basil and sesame flavor many popular African dishes while flowering plants such as castor bean have ornamental and medicinal (potentially poisonous) value. Sunflowers provide nutritious seeds in the center of their bright faces. While exploring the wilds of the Okavango Delta, come visit the domestic side of life in the African Village Garden.

## **Some of the varieties in the garden and the viewing areas include:**

- 'Calaloo' amaranth- Burgundy and green oval leaves for salads and braising
- 'Grey-Speckled Palapye' cowpea- Botswana, leaves, pods, and dried peas are eaten.
- 'Gbogname' eggplant collards- Togo, bitter 3" green fruit plus edible leaves
- 'Burkina Faso' eggplant- Red-orange, 4", ribbed fruit
- 'African' okra- Tall, heirloom variety. Okra originates from Northeast Africa.

## **More varieties in the garden and the viewing areas:**

- 'Carolina Black' peanut- Heirloom variety closest to the black, African groundnut, or Bambarra, which will not grow in this climate.
- 'African Pequin' pepper- 1.5", red, HOT peppers. Popular African seasoning
- 'Fatali' pepper- 2.5", yellow HOT peppers from the Congo
- 'Giganteus' sunflower- Seed used for food and cooking oil.
- 'Togo Trifle' tomato- 2" ribbed, pink fruit
- 'White Wonder' melon- 3-8lb watermelons with white flesh

# African Village Garden cont.

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## For a Taste of Africa:

### West African Lemony Chicken and Okra Soup

2 lemons, juiced  
2 ½ lb. broiler chicken, cut up  
6 cups chicken broth or water  
1 large onion, peeled and chopped  
3 tomatoes, peeled and chopped  
6 oz. tomato paste  
2 cups okra, sliced (or 1 15 oz. can, drained)  
1/3 cup long grained rice, uncooked  
2 tsp salt  
1/4 tsp pepper  
1/2 tsp ground red pepper (or more to taste)  
1 tsp ground turmeric

Rub chicken pieces with lemon juice. Place in large pot with broth (or water) and bring to boil. Lower heat and cook slowly, covered, 12 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and cook slowly about 30 minutes until chicken and rice are tender. Remove chicken pieces, cut meat in bite-sized pieces, and return it to the pot.

Serves 4-6.

### Nigerian Peanut Soup

4 cups chicken broth  
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced  
1/2 cup green pepper, chopped  
1/2 cup onion, chopped  
1/2 cup peanut butter (fresh ground or natural, best)

Bring broth and jalapeno peppers to a boil. Stir in green pepper and onion, and return to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer about 10 minutes until vegetables are tender. Remove from heat and add peanut butter. Stir constantly until peanut butter is melted and well blended.

Serves 4.

### Seed Sources:

- Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, Reimer Seeds, Seeds of Change,
- Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Echo Seeds, etc.

### Books:

- *100 Vegetables and Where They Came From* by William Woys Weaver
- *The Africa Cookbook Tastes of a Continent* by Jessica B. Harris

**A Special Thanks** to the Virginia Beach Master Gardener Volunteers who plant, maintain, and teach in the African Village Garden.