



Pennsylvania Gourd Society

Vine to Design; Mold is Okay

Fact Sheet

Pennsylvania Gourd Society
(CHI Chapter of the American Gourd Society)
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Gourds are fun easy to grow! They do require lots of space, light and water and may do better if started indoors depending on where you live. For more complete information use Ginger Summit's book [Gourds in Your Garden](#) or visit our website and choose tutorials.

What kind of Gourds?

Gourds are in the cucurbit family along with pumpkins, melons and cucumbers. If you have already been growing gourds you may know that there are two basic types grown here in Pennsylvania, ornamentals and hard shelled gourds. The small, colorful gourds found readily in grocery stores and farmer's markets in the fall are ornamental gourds, *Cucurbita pepo*. These have yellow flowers and bloom during the day. The resulting small gourds should be picked before frost to preserve their color. Most of these gourds left to dry after the fall season will not dry hard enough to make a lasting craft.

The hard shelled gourds *Lagenaria siceraria* have white flowers and bloom at night. It is essential that these gourds remain on the vine until after the first hard frost kills the vine. These hard shelled gourds have a long growing season, about 140 days or more. Anything that lengthens their growing time is a good idea.

Do not pick your gourds when they are the size that you want! Gourds removed from the vine too soon will become soft and rotten.

What will my gourds look like?

The future gourd's size and shape is determined by the genes in the seed that you plant. All of the gourds that grow on one gourd plant will usually be the same, barring some interesting variations that seem to spring up from time to time. If you purchase the seed from a reputable grower they can tell you the degree of certainty that your gourds will be a certain type such as bottle or bird house shaped as opposed to long snake gourds or kettle gourds. Sources for gourd seeds are found on our website.

You can grow these gourds close to one another without influencing the types of gourds that you get. If you save the seeds from your gourd crop, however, the second generation that results during the next growing season will show the tremendous and interesting variation that can result. When you accept such "open pollinated" seed from a friend you will not be sure what type of gourd you will get, but in this is much fun and adventure!

What special care do my gourd plants need?

Besides full sun your gourds need adequate water. An inch of rain a week, tracked with a simple rain gauge, is usually sufficient. During dry spells, especially from the time gourds start to form until the end of July, your gourd plants will produce better if you are able to water them.

When and how do I harvest my gourds?

After the first hard frost kills the leaves on the gourd vines, you can harvest your gourds. You could also leave them unharvested in your garden for some time but if you do this it would be a good idea to make sure the gourds are not contacting the bare ground. You could make a

mound of straw under each one to make sure it stays fairly dry underneath.

Harvested gourds should be placed somewhere outside up off the ground. Placing them on pallets underneath some evergreen trees or under a deck allows for plenty of air circulation while making sure the gourd does not sit in damp debris. It can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months for gourds to dry out depending on their size and environmental conditions.

You do not want to put your gourds inside your home or even your garage or any enclosed space where you spend time. Their outer layer normally gets moldy and you do not want to inhale the resulting spores.

This mold often results in the mottled appearance of the gourds that so many of us gourd aficionados love. It is important to check your gourds periodically and even rotate them. The gourds should remain hard. Any soft gourds should be thrown out.

How do I know when my gourds are ready to clean and craft?

When the gourd is light and has no wet patches that appear on the otherwise dry gourd you can clean and craft the gourd. Sometimes you can even hear the seeds rattling inside but often the seeds are held securely to the inside of the gourd and don't move enough to make a sound.

How do I clean my gourds?

All you need to clean the gourds are a non scratching Teflon pan cleaner such as a chore boy or a copper scrubbing ball, some warm water and detergent and a dust mask or respirator. You want to scrub hard enough to clean off the mold and dry skin but not hard enough to leave scratches on the gourd's surface.

Wet the gourd and rub it with liquid dish detergent. Then wrap it in a wet towel for a half an hour or so. You want to protect your lungs from the mold and its spores that you are going to clean away. It is best to do this project outside or in a well ventilated area. Once you have scrubbed away the mold and skin just rinse your gourd and allow it to re-dry. You are now ready to craft!

What is the simplest way to craft my gourds?

You can paint your gourd or apply a finish that will allow the mottled texture of the gourd's surface to show through. Wood stain, leather dye or shoe polishes are some of the coloring agents crafters frequently use. These should be protected with a polyurethane coating, varnish, wax or even floor polish. If your gourd is going to go outside in the weather look for a marine varnish. The varnish may be tinted and change the shade of your work so experiment on scrap pieces of gourd to get the look that you want.

How do I cut my gourd?

Many crafters who work on gourds use miniature jig saws available through hobby supply sources. You may, however use more common tools. After marking the gourd with a pencil, gently bore a start hole with an ice pick or awl. Insert the blade of a sharp Exacto knife or a small, fine bladed hand saw and work along your penciled guide. It is best to wear a dust mask anytime you cut a gourd to avoid inhaling particulate matter.

Once you have opened the gourd you will see the dry tissue and seeds that are inside. If you want to clean the gourd out continue to wear your dust mask or respirator and scrape away this dry tissue and loosen the seeds from the inside of the gourd wall. Something like a melon baller works well.

What are some of the more involved finishing techniques?

Gourds can be pyroengraved or wood burned, carved or cut artistically and have many things added like a type of inlay, beads, clay, woven rims, bases and so on. There is almost no limit to the ideas for finishing your gourd!

There are many books and Internet tutorials that go into detail on the various finishing techniques. For further information you can visit the website of both the Pennsylvania Gourd Society and the American Gourd Society. These are www.pagourdsociety.org and www.americangourdsociety.org respectively.