

BASIC CUTTING

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Much enjoyment and art can be achieved through the cutting of gourds. By starting simple and progressing as your confidence and experience grows, anyone can soon be creating exciting pieces of gourd art.

I recommend the MicroLux Gourd Saw and transformer. The gourd saw is 3 1/2" in length, weighs 9.2 oz., and has an operation range of 1800 to 6900 RPM. More important than the specifications is the fact that it has a very small rounded shoe, or base; the blade works through which allows you to follow the contour of any gourd shape. With personal preference aside, the very important point I want to make is that a small saw of any make can handle large jobs, but large saws cannot handle small jobs. The small saws available can be used for a variety of things from cutting tops off of gourds, cutting shapes, to cutting fairly intricate designs.

To start the process, a starting hole must be made for the blade to fit into. The most common ways of doing this are to use an Exacto knife or drill a small hole. Once you have a hole large enough for your blade to fit into, you simply start cutting. For beginners, I recommend more holes and cutting as many nearly straight lines or simple curves as possible. As you become more comfortable with your saw and confident in your abilities, you can reduce the number of starting points and increase your curves, circles, shapes, and stretch yourself to new levels.

There is one very important, but probably overlooked fact that bears mentioning. Any gourd is at its absolute strongest when the surface is totally intact. Each hole drilled, and each cut made, weakens the gourd. Eventually, any and every gourd can break. There are three easy steps that make this situation much more manageable.

- Run your saw at the slowest speed that will still cut the gourd. Speed causes vibration and vibration is what breaks the gourds.
- Decide where the weakest part of your gourd will be when your project is complete. That spot is where you begin cutting. Vibration will have less impact on your project.
- Give some thought as to how you are going to hold your gourd. If at all possible, do not hold on to one of the weak spots.

One very important part of gourd cutting that cannot be overlooked is the dust that is created. It is generally agreed to by most experienced gourders, that it is toxic and should not be inhaled. Many people have allergic type reactions to the dust. At the very least, an inexpensive dust mask should be used for protection. A more expensive painter's mask is not unreasonable. I, myself, and hopefully others, are working on developing a system that will remove the dust while allowing the use of a good mask.

REMEMBER Practice makes perfect. Have fun shaping your gourds.