

Drying And Harvesting Gourds

By *John Sturgeon*

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Ornamental, soft-shelled gourds are ready to harvest when the tendril next to the gourd turns brown or the stems are dry and brown. Ornamentals are often picked prior to being fully mature and used for fall displays. If harvested early and not mature, these soft-shelled gourds may develop wrinkled skins and rot. When the gourds rattle [dry], you can paint or polish them with products used for finishing wood. Ornamental make excellent holiday ornaments or add interest to wreaths.

Hard-shell gourds require 110 to 150 days of warm weather to fully mature. They should be left on the vine as long as there is life in the vine. They must be cured. Since gourds are over 90% water, it may take several months for a large gourd to dehydrate. I wait till after hard frost in central Indiana to harvest my hard-shells.

Freezing temperatures do not hurt mature gourds. If the gourds wrinkle up, this indicates an immature gourd. One can leave gourds outside to dry or use an attic or garage. The outer skin will mold, rot, and began to peel as the gourd dries. **DO NOT THROW AWAY THE MOLDY GOURD.** After the fruit [gourd] has dried, scrape off the outer skin remaining to reveal the hard permanent shell below the grime. Soak dried gourds in water for a few minutes and wash/scrape. Use of a plastic scrubbing pad works for removing most of the mold. The mold patches may have discolored the shell but this can be painted over or use a clear finish to Enhance the appearance. Remember any wood finishing product can be used on a dried gourd.