

Gourd Containers

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Have you ever heard someone say they have no artist talent? Well, that person just hasn't found his artistic medium. Here are instructions for some gourd bowls or containers that anyone can make-parental supervision for younger artists, please.

Select a gourd, which sets level on a flat surface. Wash and clean the gourd exterior, making sure all the skin is removed. You may use a metal scourer but take care not to scratch or gouge the gourd surface.

Examine the gourd form to see where the cut will look best on its shape and mark your cutting line with a pencil. One technique to get a straight line on the gourd is to set the gourd on a table next to a stack of books, stacked to the height you want to cut the gourd. Lay a pencil flat on the stack of books and with its tip just touching the gourd, hold the pencil firmly in place with one hand and with the other hand, slowly rotate the gourd. Any stray pencil marks will erase easily.

Now cut the gourd with your tool of choice. I prefer a miniature crafter's jigsaw, available from The Canning Shop catalog. Scrape the gourd inside clean and sand smooth. A piece of drywall sanding screen (found near the sandpaper in a hardware store) works nicely on gourd interiors. At this point, your gourd container is prepared for crafting. Following are two simple methods.

For the first idea, you will use a simple wood burning tool and a gourd with some markings of mold on it. The mold markings are the mottled patterns left on a gourd, which has dried naturally. Study the gourd markings and with a wood burning tool simply burn along the outlines of these mottled patterns. Try to make long continuous marks that connect rather than short choppy ones. If you have never used a wood burning tool, before you start on this project, practice on a gourd scrap FIRST. After you have finished burning, spend some time polishing the gourd with fine steel wool (00-0000) and you will be rewarded with a lustrous shine. To finish this gourd you could try burning the cut edge.

Leather dye is another crafting medium. A well-known brand is Fiebing and may be found at some shoe repair shops. A word of caution: leather dye is permanent and a little goes a long way. Take precautions and protect your work surface with a thick layer of old newspaper. You may also want to use rubber gloves. Leather dye may be thinned with rubbing alcohol but not completely removed. Normally leather dye comes with a dauber for application, but you can also use a cotton swab. Rub the lightly saturated dauber evenly and quickly across the gourd. Lighter dye colors will allow the natural mottled pattern to show through. The dye dries quickly and any excess can be rubbed off with a rag or paper towel.

I have noticed with some colors, red in particular; the dye will continue to come off the gourd onto your hands even after drying. You can prevent this with a finishing coat of polyurethane. To finish the gourd you could stain the cut edges, taking care not to let the dye bleed down inside the gourd. Another technique would be to wrap the edge with a weaving material. To do this drill small evenly spaced holes around the perimeter about 1/2 inch from the cut edge. A variety of materials can be used; for example long pine needles, sea grass, raffia, or reed. Lay the material along the edge of the cut gourd and tie in place by weaving artificial sinew, leather strips or other string, through the holes, over the material and back through the holes to hold fast. If additional ornamentation is desired, thread items like shells, beads, or seeds onto the sinew.

One of the best attributes is that gourds may be crafted in so many different mediums. With some experimentation, most will find a medium they can use to enjoy working with gourds.