

Gourds In General

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There are two basic types of gourds. They are the Lagenaria's (commonly known as hardshells) and there is the cucurbita (commonly known as ornamentals). The hardshells have a white bloom and normally bloom in the evening, through the night, or early morning. The ornamentals have a yellow bloom, and bloom through the day. The hardshells generally require a longer growing season than the ornamentals.

A hard shell seed is usually tan to dark brown in color with varying stripes and notches. It can be from 1/4" long to 1" long (longer or shorter in some varieties) with a fairly hard shell around the embryo. An ornamental seed is usually a solid whitish color. It is 3/16" long to approximately 3/8" with some larger varieties up to 1/2" long or longer with a softer shell around the embryo.

The germination of the hardshells normally takes about twice as long as the ornamentals, sometimes 2 weeks or more. It is common to soak the hardshell seeds in water overnight or longer to help speed up the germination process.

When planting, cover the hardshells with at least 1" of fine soil, and at least 1/2" of fine soil on the ornamentals. Keep well watered (but not soaking wet) until germination and with at least 1" of rain/water a week after they have sprouted into plants and are growing good.

After your plants are growing good, they will turn into vines. On these vines, there will appear other vines (side shoots) and tendrils reaching out to wrap around something. It is common for the main vine to be 6' to 12' in length, with some vines reaching 25' to 30', while the tendrils can be 3" to 1' long or more. Tendrils normally appear immediately beside the leaf stem.

The cucumber beetle is a common pest among the gourds. There is a striped cucumber beetle, as well as a spotted cucumber beetle. They are yellow and black and about 3/8" long. They can fly as well as walk. Their favorite food is the young sprouts and the blossom. However, they will also eat other parts of the plant and the gourd itself. In some cases, the cucumber beetle can be very beneficial. If there aren't any bees pollinating the blooms through the day, or moths pollinating the blooms at night, the cucumber beetle may be your only pollinator, day and night.

When harvesting your gourds, you generally want to wait until the vine dies and turns brown. sometimes, they can be harvested earlier with some success too. The gourds nearest the start of the plant will usually be the most mature and will keep the best.

During the curing and drying process, the gourd will normally be covered with a mold. This is the moisture escaping from within the gourd. If the gourd is left outside through the freezing winter, the gourd may not mold. Instead, the skin will become a dry flaky substance that can be scraped off very easily. Some folks think that when the mold appears, it is starting to rot and throw the gourds away. Not so! Only if the gourds shrivel up, shrink, and turn to "mush," are they rotten. A mature gourd can also be scraped before it starts to mold and help speed up the curing process, commonly referred to as 'green cleaning'. When a gourd is completely dry, you should (but not always) be able to hear the seeds 'rattle' inside it. Both types of gourds can be cured in this manner and used in numerous varieties of crafts and gourd works.

The hardshell gourd will usually have a shell 1/8" to 1/4" thick, with some thinner and some thicker. An ornamental gourd will commonly be approximately 1/16" to possibly 1/8" thick in most varieties. The ornamental can sometimes be very fragile, while the hardshells can take a little rougher treatment.

This information is of my own knowledge and experiences in working with gourds and in different aspects of growing and crafting. Gourds can be very interesting and lots of fun. Give gourds a try, and GOURD LUCK!

For more information on gourds and gourd events, contact the Indiana Gourd Society.