

## **Growing, Curing, Cleaning and Crafting Gourds**

*By Jim Story*

Date: Unknown

### **WHY GROW GOURDS**

Gourds are one of the world's most versatile plants. The many shapes and sizes of the fruits, lightness when cured (dried), their lasting qualities, and the many utilitarian purposes make the gourd a favorite of gardeners and craftsmen worldwide. Dried gourds have been made into bowls, storage containers, dippers, birdhouses, vases, pitchers, dolls, musical instruments (gourds are excellent resonators), lamps, jewelry, birds, animals, reptiles, insects, wreaths, wall hangings, Christmas ornaments, contrived flowers, caricatures and even cathouses. Gourds are excellent material for fall decorations and are attractive and in demand in creative floral designs. They are popular sale items at ways and means tables.

### **GOURD CULTURE**

There are two species of gourds: cucurbita pepo, the colorful, yellow flowered ornamental; and the Lagenaria siceraria, the white flowered hard shell kind. Lagenaria require a long growing season (130 frost free days) to fully mature. It is important to get them started early so plant as soon as possible after the danger of frost has passed. Seeds can be started inside about 35 days before the last frost. Too early will let the plants get leggy and difficult to transplant. Harden off plants before planting where they will grow. Ornamental gourd seeds can be planted (direct seeded) in the garden after danger of frost has passed.

Gourd culture is similar to that of pumpkins, cucumbers and squash. Plant in full sun and allow plenty of room for the vines that sometimes grow to a length of 30 or more feet. Gourds may be grown on the ground, but it is preferable to grow them on a fence or trellis. Hand pollinate lagenarias to increase yield. Both kinds can be grown in molds to obtain unusual shapes. Use 1/4" or thicker plexiglass to make molds. Wood and plaster forms may be used but I prefer translucent (clear) molds.

### **CURING GOURDS**

Both the ornamentals and hardshell gourds can be cured outside. Winter weather will not damage the shells of fully mature gourds and the freezing and thawing makes the skin easier to remove. To save seed, the gourd must be brought inside to dry. Put small gourds in a mesh bag and drape over a fence or tree limb. Shake the bag every three or four weeks. Cure large gourds off the ground where they will get good air circulation. No matter how moldy it looks, it is good. The shell below the mold will be a beautiful tan. Immature gourds will shrivel during the curing process and should be discarded.

### **CLEANING GOURDS**

To bring out the beauty of gourds and to prepare them for crafting, they must be cleaned. This means removing the outside skin and mold. Soak gourds in warm water until the outside skin becomes soft, then remove the skin with a steel scouring pad and/or knife. Some folks use soapy water to clean gourds, but just plain water will do. When the cleaned gourds are dry, they are ready for crafting.

### **CRAFTING GOURDS**

Craftsmen are limited only by their imagination as to the things that can be made from gourds. Gourds can be sawed, drilled, etched, burned (wood burning tool, dyed, painted, stained and varnished. mature gourds are light and durable, making them an excellent medium for all sorts of crafting ideas. Creative people love gourds.

**GOURD KNOWLEDGE** may be obtained by: (1) attending a gourd show; (2) joining the Indiana and American Gourd societies; (3) gourd books; and/or (4) visiting a gourd grower.

### **MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION**

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