

## Harvest Complete? Now What?

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Date: Unknown

Many growers can tell you that the best crop you will ever grow is likely to be the last crop you grow before you decide what you want to do with your gourds. That results in the often heard question, "What do I do with all these gourds?"

The first thing you must do is to provide adequate storage to allow for good dry down of the harvest. Perhaps the easiest and most widely used method is to store your crop on wood skids, raised off the ground, sitting outside. Air circulation is very important to the drying process. The changes we experience in our winter weather also help the process, as well as starting the cleaning process. If possible, the drying area should be set up in a fenced, or otherwise contained area. The reason for this, is that as your gourds dry, they will become much lighter. Which means strong Spring winds can leave gourds scattered across your yard. Installing some type of simple side on your wooden skids can reduce this problem. You also must take into consideration how much snow might accumulate under your skids. Depending on where you live, drifting or snow fence effect could influence where you place your drying station.

Once your gourds have all been placed in your drying station, you can forget about them until winter looses its grip. However, you will receive a better dry down if you continue to monitor your gourds thru the winter months. Rotating, or turning your gourds once a month, along with removing any shriveled, or collapsed gourds will maximize the benefits of your drying station.

If your crop included more than one variety of gourd, they may dry down at different speeds. It stands to reason that a Mini-Nigerian will dry much quicker than a Nigerian Wine Bottle. To a degree different varieties require different tactics. While the Mini-Nigerian dries down easily, it is also easily lost if the wind catches it. While the Wine Bottle will almost demand regular turning to achieve a successful dry down. Some varieties, such as the apple, just dry very slowly. The Apple is relatively small in size, but is one of the slowest to dry.

Despite all of the variables, drying your crop is not a particularly difficult task. Good advice is to seek out an experienced grower if you have any questions.

Here are a few suggestions. Some, you may not have thought about. You can place an advertisement in your state's gourd society newsletter, or even the AGS publication, "The Gourd". The possible need to ship gourds may be a draw back to this method. A more regional solution might be your local newspaper.

Another option could be your local library. Many libraries have youth programs with directors who could utilize gourds in their programs. Along these same lines, art teachers and art departments have budgets to spend on supplies. Contacting, and education local art teachers could lead to nice sales. Both of these options could lead to additional sales over the original project makes it home. Yet another option, along these lines would be senior or assisted living centers. They also often have group art activities.

A source of possible sales that seems to be growing is "farmers markets" and auctions. Sales prices may be lower or even out of your control, but it allows you to move a large volume of gourds quickly. Some

growers choose to sell green, or current season gourds, thru this route. You must be very careful if you choose to utilize this route. At the very least, you should include information on proper drying procedures. Even experienced growers don't have 100% successful dry downs. So public relations damage to yourself as a grower and fellow gourders, could be difficult to overcome.

The easiest method if your location allows, may be to place a sign in your yard. This may require some educating of the general public in your home area. Over time this method can develop a loyal client base.

The most successful method may be a combination of two or more of the above options. The important thing is to ask questions and have fun with your gourds.