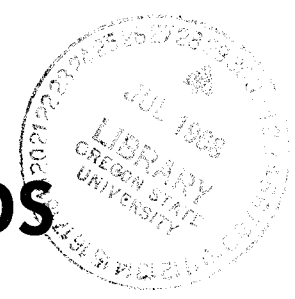


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GOURDS ARE closely related to cucumbers, cantaloupes, watermelons, pumpkins, and squash. Ornamental gourds are not considered suitable for food and are grown for their other uses. Some gourds are used for food in other countries.

There are three general groups of gourds:

1. Yellow-flowered—grown for temporary use in the fall.
2. White-flowered—ultimately dried for decorative and useful purposes.
3. Cream-flowered or light yellow-flowered—the *Luffa* or sponge gourds.

Many genera are considered gourds; among them are *Cucurbita*, *Lagenaria*, *Luffa*, *Benincasa*, *Momordica*, *Sechium*, *Telfairia*, and *Tricosanthes*. These are of interest to collectors, and certain unusual species of these are found only in greenhouses in the North Temperate zone.

Amateur gourd fanciers customarily classify gourds into hard-shell and soft-shell. Hard-shell gourds dry quickly; soft-shell gourds dry very slowly or not at all.

### Culture of the Common Gourds

Gourds are grown in full sun from seeds planted about ½ inch deep in rich, moist soil. Seedlings may be started in plant bands or berry boxes indoors and transplanted to the garden after danger of frost is past.

Gourds are best planted near stumps, fences, trellises, or other supports on which the plants can climb. Sturdy trellises can be made from concrete-reinforcing wire with a 6-inch mesh. Gourds allowed to hang down will be straighter and better

formed, although some precautions should be taken to protect the fruits from scarring due to wind whipping. Prize gourds may be supported in cheesecloth slings.

Gourds require enough water and fertilizer to maintain constant, vigorous growth. The soil should be deep and well drained. Thoroughly soak the soil beneath the plants every seven to eight days during the early part of the growing season. Do not wet the vines any more than necessary, as this will encourage foliage diseases. Irrigate less frequently as the growing season draws to a close and the fruits begin to harden.

### Disease and Insect Control

Start with clean seed from a reliable source. Remove any diseased or wilted plants. Rotate to a new location if diseases that cause wilting occur.

Apply an insecticide such as diazinon or malathion whenever insects reach damaging numbers. Watch especially for aphids. Use poison baits for slugs. Use DDT as protection against cutworms and stalk borers.

### Shaping Gourds

Gourds may be made to grow in odd shapes by tying soft cloth tape around them. The shape of the snake gourd may be changed by frequent and gentle bending with the hands. The stem ends of



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calabash gourds may be tied to give them a desired curve. As a novelty, gourds are sometimes grown inside bottles which mold their shapes; then the bottles are broken before the gourds mature.

### Harvesting

Delay harvesting until the gourd stem begins to turn brown or the leaves start to die after the gourds have matured. Usually a short piece of stem is left on the gourd, so they are best harvested by clipping with pruning shears.

Green-colored gourds will fade if not harvested as soon as they mature or as soon as fall rains begin in western Oregon.

### Curing

After harvesting, cure (dry) gourds in a light, warm, well-ventilated, dry place for several weeks. Usually they are cured until the beginning of the late fall and winter holiday season (Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas).

Discard all bruised or immature gourds. Disinfect the surface of gourds by rinsing with sodium hypochlorite (laundry bleach) or borax solution. Prepare the solutions by mixing 5 parts of laundry bleach or similar material with 100 parts of cold water (1 ounce to 3 quarts) or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of borax to 1 gallon of water. Borax is preferred for the brightly colored gourds. Wipe gourds with disinfectant solution again during the first week or two of curing. To store gourds, hang them from strings or place them only one layer deep on tables, slatted shelves, or trays.

A small hole may be drilled in the flower end of a hard-shell gourd to hasten drying if this will not interfere with the intended use of the fruit. It is also possible to cut a small opening at the flower end, remove the seeds, and glue the plug back into the hole.

Properly cured gourds should last three to four months, and some of the very hard ones used for birdhouses and utensils may last several years.

Gourds of the dipper, spoon, and bottle types frequently used for utensils and birdhouses should

be carved before the shells become completely dry and brittle.

Do not harvest sponge gourds (*Luffa*) until after the vines are killed by frost. Soften the gourds by submerging them in water. After they have become thoroughly softened, remove the outer covering by scrubbing with a stiff brush or by rubbing the gourds together. Wash the spongy interior part in several changes of clean water, and then allow it to dry. The dried sponge may be used as a scouring pad or as a decoration, either dyed or in its natural color.

Seeds of healthy gourds may be saved and stored in a cool, dry place. The seed is viable for about four years.

### Decorating Gourds

Gourds that are to be varnished or decorated should be thoroughly washed and air dried. Hard-shell gourds may be smoothed with fine steel wool (any sandpaper is too coarse). Complete all cutting, carving, and gluing before applying any designs. Clean and smooth the inside of opened gourds.

Decorated gourds may break loose if they are hung by the stems. Burn a tiny hole in the neck with a hot wire or needle, and then insert a fine wire loop or nylon filament to serve as a hanger.

Use varnish, shellac, or paste wax to accentuate the natural colors. If the gourds are to be painted, apply a sealer coat of shellac first and allow it to dry. Use quick-drying enamel paints. Painted designs commonly associated with Indian lore are usual, but original patterns are limited only by the imagination of the artist. Ornamental gourd collections may be combined with pine cones, seed pods, brightly colored peppers, and unusual leaves or dried grasses.

*Source of periodical and special reference material:* The Gourd Society of America, Inc., Elmwood, Massachusetts 02337.

Seeds of ornamental gourds are available from many sources. George W. Park Seed Co., Inc., Greenwood, South Carolina 29646, has one of the largest collections.