



GROWING GOURDS

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Gourds are very closely related to cucumbers, squash and melons. They have been grown for both ornamental and utility purposes for many years. Several societies have been established to bring together people who are fascinated by the uniqueness of these plants.

Climatic Requirements – Gourds are tender annuals that thrive in areas where the temperature is 70 to 85°F. About 100 to 180 days are required to mature most varieties. Starting plants in containers will lengthen the season and improve quality for the long season types (mostly Lagenaria).

Spacing and Trellising – Because different varieties vary widely in the size of fruit and vine, their spacing and trellising requirements vary also. The small ornamental types such as bicolor pear can be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart provided they are trellised vertically 6 to 8 ft. Larger types, such as dipper and water bottle, require wider spacing and a very substantial trellis to hold the weight of the fruit. Gourds may also be grown on an arbor consisting of posts and several overhead crosspieces. Gourd fruit hangs underneath the vines. It's a good idea not to make the arbor more than 3 to 4 ft wide.

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Types of Gourds

Cucurbita Gourds (Yellow Flowered)

Aladdin	Egg
Orange	Warted
Apple	Flat Striped
Pear (bi-color)	Malahar Melon
Bell	Spoon
Crown of Thorns	Miniature
Turks Turbin	

Lagenaria Gourds (White Flowered)

Bottle (Giant, Miniature, Siphon)	Dipper
Calabash (Penguin, Powderhorn)	Longissima
Dolphin (Maranka)	Martin (Birdhouse)
Caneman's Club	Hercules Bulb
Carsican Flat	Italian Edible (Cucuzzi)

Miscellaneous Gourds

Luffa (Dishrag)	Serpent Gourd
Momordica	Teasel (Squirting Cucumber)

Fertilization – Because of their very large amount of vine growth, gourds require fertile soil that is liberally supplied with nutrients. Rates of 100 to 150 lb each, of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium per acre, are adequate initially. Side-dressings with 20 to



30 lb per acre of nitrogen every 2 to 3 weeks also keeps the plants vigorously growing. By late summer, nutrients and water can be reduced. This will permit plants to slow their growth and fruits to harden off.

Diseases and Insects – A number of diseases (anthracnose, downy mildew, powdery mildew, and alternaria) and insects (striped and spotted cucumber beetles, vine borer, and aphids) attack gourds. Few available chemicals will specifically mention gourds on their label. For the most part, those materials that control diseases and insects on cucumbers and melons will also control these pests on gourds. Luffa types are generally tolerant to insects and diseases.

Shaping – Many gourds are prized for their interesting shapes. You can create new shapes by tying soft string or bands around young fruit. Long, slender types can be formed to look like snakes by frequently and gently bending the fruit, or by tying the fruit to keep it under slight bending pressure. The young fruit is sometimes inserted into a glass container, and the fruit will take on the shape of the container. When desired, the container can be removed by carefully breaking. Avoid scratching the fruit if possible.

Harvesting

Cucurbita gourds are fleshy and subject to injury when subjected to frost or freezing conditions. They should be harvested when mature and before cold weather. These gourds are more difficult to cure and must be kept in a cool dry place for several weeks, and sometimes months.

Lagenaria gourds are not readily damaged by light frost and may be harvested later in the fall. The fruits should be fully mature and handled carefully.

Luffa gourds may be harvested when the fruits turn brown.

Stems of all gourds should be cut with some of the stem remaining. Use sharp shears and make clean cuts. Generally, stemless gourds are less useful for decoration.

Cleaning and Curing

Cucurbita gourds: Harvest only fully mature specimens and wash thoroughly in a solution of some type of

non-bleaching detergent (sulphonaphthol is one) with a soft brush. After washing, place the gourds in a dry place out of direct sunlight and with good air circulation. Leave them until thoroughly dry and hardened. After fully hardening, the gourds can be waxed, painted or decorated, as you like.

Lagenaria gourds – These gourds need to be washed in a similar manner as cucurbita gourds. However, these types require very long drying periods to fully harden off. A barn attic with a metal roof usually works well. There must be plenty of ventilation. It's best if the gourds do not touch each other during drying.

Luffa gourds – There are two types of luffas. *L. acutangula* (sharply ridged) and *L. aegyptica* (smooth surface) are both used for decorations; however, aegyptica tend to have a greater quality of spongy interior. These gourds are washed similarly to lagenaria and cucurbita gourds. They must be dried thoroughly. The exterior skin is then removed by retting (soaking in water) for several days until all that is left is the spongy fiber. After retting, the sponge should be shaped and dried. If desired, the spongy fiber can be bleached with hydrogen peroxide.

Saving Seeds – It is not uncommon to save seeds from a gourd only to find that the next crop doesn't look like the original. These varieties freely inter-pollinate within a given group. If you want to produce pure seed, you'll need to self-pollinate by hand or plant a single type in isolation.

Seeds that are fully dry can be kept in a cool, dry spot for 3 to 4 years with little loss in vitality.

Want to know more about gourds?

Write: The American Gourd Society
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or

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