



HARVESTING AND DRYING GOURDS

The fruit of the small ornamental gourds are colorful and come in a variety of shapes and colors including bicolored. Gourds may have a smooth or warty surface and come in various shapes including egg, pear, ball, bottle, spoon, or turban.

Ornamental gourds are harvested, dried, and hardened to use for decoration. Larger gourds, such as birdhouse and bushel can be used for crafts, utensils, and birdhouses.

Harvesting

Allow ornamental gourds to ripen fully on the vine, harvest gourds when they feel firm, and the skin is hard. A stem that is brown and drying is a sign that the gourd is ripe and ready to harvest.

When harvesting, know that the skin is susceptible to bruising or scratching, so use sharp shears or a knife and leave a few inches of the stem attached to avoid bruising the fruit. The stem sometimes drops off as the gourd dries, but if it remains intact it may enhance the decorative effect.

Drying

After harvesting, wash the gourds in warm soapy water and rinse them in clean water to which a household disinfectant has been added (1-part disinfectant to 10 parts water). This removes any soil and soil-borne pathogens clinging to the shell. Dry each gourd with a soft cloth to avoid scratching or bruising the tender skin.

Spread the gourds out on several layers of newspaper or shelves in a warm, dry, and well-ventilated location. Space the gourds so that they don't touch. Turn the fruits daily and replace any damp newspapers with dry paper. Large gourds can be hung up for the drying process. Surface drying takes about one week. During this time the outer skin hardens, and the surface color sets.

Gourds that were not mature at harvest will begin to shrivel or develop soft spots. These gourds should be discarded to prevent molds and bacteria from spreading to healthy gourds.

Hardening

For the final drying period, wipe the gourds with a soft cloth soaked in household disinfectant. Poke a small hole in the blossom end of the gourds to speed drying.

Next, spread the fruits in a single layer on newspapers in a warm, dry, dark place, such as a closet floor, heated basement, beneath a bed or chest of drawers. Heat encourages rapid drying; darkness prevents fading of color, and dryness discourages mold and mildew.

Check the gourds every few days, turning them and discarding any that show signs of deteriorating. Drying is finished when gourds are lightweight and the seeds rattle inside.

Depending upon the size of your gourds, drying and hardening will take several weeks to months. In one to two weeks, the outer skin will start to harden, and the color will set. Internally, it will take several additional weeks to complete the curing process.

Once dried, gourds can be displayed in their natural state or may be treated with wax or shellac for a hard glossy finish. Large gourds, when dried properly, are the same texture and density as that of wood and can be smoothed with steel wool or sandpaper. The smooth hard surface can then be painted, stained, polished, or waxed. A large gourd can be turned into a bird feeder or birdhouse by adding an opening.