

## Ornamental Gourds

With a little planning this spring, next fall you will be able to harvest your very own crop of ornamental gourds. Gourds mature in 90 to 100 days so it is not too late to plant a crop for this year.

*Cucurbita pepo* (ornamental gourds) belong to the same family as melons, pumpkins, squash and cucumbers, the Cucurbit family. Gourds are further divided into three main types: Lagenaria, large utilitarian gourds; *Cucurbita*, ornamental gourds; and Luffa, a vegetable sponge. This article is only going to deal with ornamental gourds.



### Culture

Ornamental gourds should be planted when all danger of frost is past. Gourds do best planted near something that will allow the vines to climb. Keeping the fruit off the ground helps prevent rot. Plant the seeds 1 to 2 inches deep, 12 to 24 inches apart in soil that contains plenty of compost, is well drained and receives lots of sunshine. Keep the plants moist.

How much to fertilize the vines is a tightrope the grower walks. Too much and you have heavy vine growth and retardation of fruiting. Too little and you have weak vines and no fruit. The consensus appears to be working fertilizer into a ring around the hill when you plant your gourds and again 30 days later. The root system is shallow so care must be taken when weeding and fertilizing.

Gourds are monoecious, that is they have separate male and female flowers on the same plant. The male flowers appear first, followed by female flowers. You can tell when the female flowers begin because there is a small

gourd shape beneath the petals. The flowers are yellow in color and stay open for only one day. You can pollinate your flowers with a toothbrush to ensure fruiting.



### Insects and Disease

Gourds are subject to attack by the cucumber beetle, squash vine borer, aphids and slugs. They are also susceptible to downy and powdery mildew. Avoid overhead watering as it encourages mildews.

## Harvesting

Gourds should be allowed to mature and dry on the vine. If they are not thoroughly ripened when picked, rot is a definite possibility. When cutting them, use sharp shears and leave a few inches of stem attached. Be careful not to break the skin when handling the gourd. Any cuts or bruises can become entry points for disease and rot. Frost will kill the vine but will not harm mature gourds.

## Curing

Wipe the fruit with rubbing alcohol, or dip it into a bath of one part bleach and nine parts water. Dry the gourd and leave it to cure in a dry, warm, airy room. The top of your refrigerator is an ideal spot. Turn them often and make sure that they do not touch one another. Check the gourds frequently and discard any that are beginning to rot. After the gourds have dried, you can polish them with a liquid wax.

Use your gourds to decorate for fall. Place them in a bowl. Gather the stems together and hang them as a swag. Make a wreath. When the season is ended, they can be stored in a dark dry place for next year, or you can break your favorites open, harvest the seeds and start over again next spring.

## References

[Ornamental Gourds](#) Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension service, MF-847, November 2002, retrieved 3/10/04.

Jones, Terry; Witt, Mary; Strang, John; Nesmith, Bill; Bessin, Ric; Isaacs, Steve; [Ornamental Gourd Production in Kentucky](#), ID-119 retrieved 3/10/04.