



Beech Creek Gourds

Clifton, TN

Getting Started with Gourds



Planting Seeds: Gourds are easy to grow and are related to the squash and cucumber family. They grow on a vine which can get quite long. Mine are typically 20 – 30 feet.

I start my plants in plastic cups. I put them outside and bring them in at night if it is going to be cold. I put 2 or 3 seeds in a cup of potting soil. Be sure to punch holes in the bottom of the cup for drainage. When they germinate, you will see 2 oblong leaves. These are not true gourd leaves. If more than one of the seeds germinates per cup, remove the others and leave the best looking seedling. After these 2 leaves the “true” gourd leaves will emerge. This may take a week or two. I usually wait until I have 3 or 4 true leaves before planting in the ground. The plant will be about 3 to 5 inches tall.

Of course, you can put the seeds directly in the ground. If you take this approach, I would also place 3 or 4 seeds per site and thin out so you have just one strong plant. When planting in the ground, allow about 5 to 6 feet between plants. Since each

plant can produce up to 40 gourds, you may not want to overdo it. My plants have never produced that much. I get about 8 to 10 gourds per plant.

At this point, the seedlings just need water and sun. Full sun is good and they like a well drained soil. We don't have this. Our soil is like clay, but we still get good gourds. When the vine starts growing, it will grow fast. This is the fun part. Eventually you will see small white flowers that bloom at night. They look pretty but smell pretty bad! If you look closely at the flowers you can tell the male from the female flowers. The females have a small bulge at the base of the flower. If pollinated, this will become the gourd.

Gourds are pollinated by the usual suspects, bees and such. If for any reason you think your females are not getting the “good stuff” you can, of course, pollinate them yourself. I just pluck off a male flower and mash it to the female. Not very romantic but it gets the job done!

Some growers recommend pruning the vine when it reaches about 8 to 10 feet. This will encourage lateral vines which contain the female flowers. I have done this on some plants and not done it on others and couldn't tell much difference but I did not do a scientific comparison. Since it helps contain the length of the vine, I will probably prune this year.

I grow some of my gourds on the ground and others on a trellis. Both systems work. If you use a trellis, make sure it is strong enough as the gourds get very heavy when they are growing and before they dry out. The vines are really good grippers, so if you plant them near anything like a fence or tree, they will climb it. Take that into consideration when locating the seeds or seedlings. Gourds grown on a trellis tend to have uniform shapes while those on the ground tend to have a flat spot where they lay on the ground. This can be useful if you are planning to make bowls and such from the gourds. It helps to go through your gourds and stand them up so you get the flat bottom where you want it.

Gourd Shapes: Gourds come in all shapes and sizes. I do not grow my gourds in isolation. In other

words, I throw all the seeds in the same garden and they have the opportunity to cross pollinate. So I never know for sure what I am going to get, (like a box of chocolates) but that is half the fun of it.

Harvesting the gourds: A lot of opinions on this one, but I find it is safest to leave the gourds on the vine as long as possible. If they are removed too soon, they will rot. It is safe to cut them off when the vine has died back. You can leave them on the vine to dry out if you like. The only downside is that animals and insects may get to them and if not destroyed, can mar them. I remove my gourds when the vine is pretty much dead, but I have a trailer where I can place them to dry out.

The Dry Out: Don't panic when you see mold growing on the outside of the gourd. This is normal and can be quite ugly. Gourds dry from the inside out. Sometimes the outside can get quite damp. I have seen mold of all colors, black, white, pink, green. It really is quite fascinating. They are best dried in an area where they can get some air circulation. This helps evaporate the moisture on the shell. The mold is what forms the patterns and staining on the gourd outer shell. If you want to minimize this, you can try washing the gourd with a mild bleach solution as you see the mold forming. I have tried this on some gourds that I think have a particularly nice shape and want to try to keep as unmarred as possible. I have had some good results but it is a lot of work because you will have to do it several times. It can take anywhere from weeks to months for the gourds to dry out. You know they are done when the seeds inside rattle or when the gourd becomes very light and dry on the outside.

Prep for Crafting: To prepare a gourd for crafting (ie cutting, painting, etc) you have to remove the mold and a paper like outer skin. I have found the best method is to scrub under warm water with one of those steel pot scrubbers (not SOS but the unsoaped coarse stainless types). If the mold is particularly stubborn, you can cover the gourd with a wet towel for several hours or a day. That seems to help.

Caution for Crafting: The interior of the hard shell gourd is full of mold. If you are going to cut into one, it is highly recommended that you wear a dust mask. If you are particularly sensitive to mold or dust, it is probably best you not get into the cutting part.

Growing gourds is almost as much fun as crafting them. I hope you give it a try. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about growing or crafting. I am not an expert, but if I can't help you I can probably send you to someone who can.

Joan

Beech Creek Gourds
6615 Beech Creek Gourds
Clifton, TN 38425

www.beechcreekgourds.com
halfbacks@tds.net
931-676-3438

