

GOURDING

A homegrown guide for beginners

**CRAFTING WITH GOURDS IS A FUN ARTISTIC ACTIVITY THAT
CAN BE ENJOYED BY ALMOST ANYONE!**

**IN THIS PRESENTATION WE WILL COVER SOME OF THE
BASICS OF GOURDING INCLUDING:**

- **GROWING**
- **SAFETY**
- **CLEANING**
- **CUTTING**
- **DECORATION**

GROWING: THE NEED FOR SEED

OBTAINING SEED IS PRETTY EASY IF YOU ARE NOT CONCERNED WITH THE TYPE OF GOURD YOU WANT TO GROW. JUST BUY A GOURD FROM THE VENDOR OF YOUR CHOICE. USUALLY, THESE GOURDS, WHILE HAVING THE DESIRED SHAPE FOR YOUR PROJECT, WILL PROBABLY HAVE BEEN GROWN IN CONDITIONS OF WILD SEXUAL ABANDON, THUS NOT ASSURING THAT THEIR OFFSPRING WILL LOOK LIKE THE ORIGINAL. IF YOU DO WISH TO GROW A SPECIFIC TYPE OF GOURD, IT IS BEST TO BUY SEED FROM A REPUTABLE GOURD VENDOR. IT CAN BE RELATIVELY PRICEY, BUT YOUR RESULTS ARE PRETTY MUCH ASSURED.



GROWING: PREPPING THE SEED

MOST GOURD SEEDS HAVE A POINTED END AND A FLAT OR “EARED” END. THE POINTED END IS WHERE THE GERM RESIDES. THE FIRST THING TO DO IN PREPARATION OF THE SEED FOR PLANTING IS TO SNIP OFF THE “EARS” OR CORNERS OF THE FLAT END. I USE A NAIL CLIPPERS TO ACCOMPLISH THE JOB.



GROWING: GERMINATION

TO GERMINATE THE SEED, OBTAIN A PIECE OF PAPER TOWEL AND A MEDIUM SIZE PLASTIC BAGGIE. WET THE PAPER TOWEL AND LAY THE SEED ON ONE HALF. FOLD THE TOWEL SO THE SEED IS SURROUNDED AND PLACE IT IN THE BAGGIE. DON'T CLOSE THE BAGGIE! IT NEEDS TO BE OPEN TO ALLOW AIR PENETRATION. PLACE YOUR MINI GREENHOUSE IN A WARM WELL-LIT (BUT NOT DIRECT SUNLIGHT) LOCATION. CHECK TO MAKE SURE THE SEEDS STAY MOIST AND THAT MILDEW IS NOT STARTING. ADD A LITTLE WATER ON OCCASION IF NEEDED.



GROWING: MAKING THE GOOD EARTH

LOCATION

WHILE YOUR SEEDS ARE STARTING TO WAKE, ITS TIME TO PREPARE YOUR SOIL, BUT FIRST, LET'S SELECT A GOOD LOCATION. GOURDS GROW BEST IN FULL SUN, WITH A WARM CLIMATE, AND IN SOIL WITH GOOD DRAINAGE AND PLENTY OF ORGANIC MATTER AND MINERALS. IF YOUR GARDEN PLOT IS IN PARTIAL SHADE, OR ITS ALWAYS COLD AND WINDY, YOU WILL HAVE PARTIAL SUCCESS. THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES WHEN GOOD LUCK IS INDEED A PRODUCT OF DESIGN!



GROWING: MAKING THE GOOD EARTH

PREPARATION

THE BEST SOIL FOR GOURDS IS A SANDY LOAM WITH LOTS OF ORGANIC MATTER, AND LOTS OF NUTRIENTS. MY GOURDS HAVE GROWN QUITE WELL WITH A COMBINATION OF COMPOSTED HORSE MANURE, USED BEDDING STRAW, BBQ ASHES, AND BAKED EGG SHELLS. THE HORSE MANURE CONTAINS ABUNDANT NITROGEN, THE BEDDING STRAW ADDS ORGANIC MATTER, THE BBQ ASHES CONTAIN PHOSPHORUS AND POTASSIUM, AND THE EGG SHELLS PROVIDE CALCIUM WHICH PROMOTES HEALTHY BLOSSOMS AND RETARDS BLOSSOM END ROT. I HAVE A CONNECTION WITH A HORSE BOARDING OPERATION WHERE I CAN GET A TRAILER-FULL OF MANURE AND BEDDING STRAW. YOU CAN CHECK AROUND AT YOUR LOCAL HORSE BOARDING BUSINESS TO SEE IF THEY HAVE MANURE AVAILABLE.



GROWING: MAKING THE GOOD EARTH

EGG SHELLS

EGG SHELLS ARE BEST IF THEY ARE BAKED IN THE OVEN AT 400 DEGREES FOR APPROXIMATELY 40 MINUTES. THIS CHANGES THE CHEMICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CALCIUM TO MAKE IT MORE READILY USABLE BY PLANTS. THE BAG ON THE LEFT CONTAINS BAKED EGG SHELLS THAT I SMASHED WITH A ROLLING PIN.



GROWING: ARCHITECTURE

PROVIDING STRUCTURE

IN ADDITION TO A GOOD LOCATION AND GREAT SOIL, MOST GOURDS NEED TO CLIMB. A TRELLIS IS A NECESSARY ADDITION FOR SMALL PLOTS AS IT ALLOWS FOR THE GOURD PLANTS TO SPREAD OUT AND GROW UPWARD. AFTER THE BLOSSOMS ARE FERTILIZED, THEY LIKE TO HANG DOWNWARD, PROTECTED FROM TOO MUCH SUN BY THE LEAVES ABOVE. I USE A 4' X 8' STIFF WIRE FENCE PANEL. I BEND IT AT A RIGHT ANGLE 2' FROM THE END AND ATTACH IT TO A COUPLE OF METAL FENCE POSTS WITH FENCING CLIPS, AND SUPPORT THE BENT END WITH A 2"X4" STUD.



GROWING: IRRIGATION

WATER EQUALS LIFE

THERE'S JUST NO WAY AROUND IT, GOURDS REQUIRE A FULL WATERING JUST ABOUT 2 TO 3 TIMES PER WEEK, DEPENDING ON LOCAL CLIMATE AND WEATHER. INTERRUPTION IN THE WATERING CYCLE CAN CAUSE STRESS TO THE PLANTS AND MAKE THE GOURDS CRACK WHEN WATER IS RE-INTRODUCED. THE BEST WAY TO WATER A GOURD PATCH IS WITH DRIP IRRIGATION AND A PROGRAMMABLE IRRIGATION CONTROLLER. GOURD PLANTS ARE EXTREMELY SUSCEPTIBLE TO MILDEW AND FUNGUS ATTACK. SPLASHING WATER ON GOURD LEAVES IS AN INVITATION TO MOLD AND FUNGUS SPORES, IN ADDITION TO CREATING A VERY WET ENVIRONMENT WHERE POWDERY MILDEW THRIVES. DRIP IRRIGATION MINIMIZES MOLD GROWTH AND SAVES WATER TO BOOT!

GROWING: CALENDAR

IN NORTH AMERICA, A TYPICAL PLANTING AND GROWING CALENDAR LOOKS LIKE THIS:

JANUARY- AMEND SOIL WITH HORSE MANURE, BBQ ASHES, AND CALCIUM

FEBRUARY- WAIT FOR MARCH, BECAUSE IT'S WINTER AND GOURDS DON'T GROW IN WINTER!

MARCH- PREPARE BEDS BY TURNING AND WEEDING. AFTER ALL CHANCE OF FROST HAS PASSED, PLANT SEED.

APRIL- WAIT WITH BATED BREATH FOR SEEDLINGS TO APPEAR. ALSO A GOOD TIME TO CLEAN LAST YEARS CROP.

MAY- TRAIN YOUNG PLANTS TO GROW ONTO TRELLISES BY TYING COTTON STRING TO STEMS AND UP TO TRELLIS.

JUNE- ADMIRE YOUR HEALTHY GOURD PLANTS! TOWARD THE MIDDLE OR END OF THE MONTH, START POLLINATING AS BLOSSOMS APPEAR.

JULY THROUGH SEPTEMBER- POLLINATE, IRRIGATE, PICK BUGS, HUG YOUR PLANTS, SING SONGS TO THEM....

OCTOBER THROUGH DECEMBER- HARVEST, PREPARE FOR NEXT YEAR.

GROWING: POLLINATION



OKAY, WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT SEX. GOURDS ARE OF THE TYPE OF PLANT WHICH PRODUCE BOTH MALE AND FEMALE FLOWERS ON EACH PLANT. THE MAIN RUNNER PRODUCES MALE FLOWERS (RIGHT). WHEN THE PLANT IS OF SUFFICIENT SIZE, IT STARTS BRANCHING FROM THE SIDES. THESE SIDE BRANCHES PRODUCE MALE AND FEMALE (LEFT) FLOWERS. GOURDS NEED POLLINATORS LIKE MOTHS, FLIES, OR MATCHMAKER HUMANS WITH LITTLE PAINT BRUSHES TO ASSIST THEM IN THEIR SEX LIVES. I TIPTOE AROUND EACH MORNING TO FIND A MALE FLOWER, SWIZZLE MY BRUSH IN THE POLLEN, AND GENTLY BRUSH IT ONTO A FEMALE FLOWER'S PISTIL. IT IS BEST NOT TO GET CARRIED AWAY WITH WILD POLLINATION ABANDON. THE BEST SIZE OF GOURD IS OBTAINED BY LIMITING THE NUMBER OF GOURDS ON EACH PLANT TO TWO. HOWEVER, THERE IS A LOT OF MORTALITY OF BLOSSOMS EVEN IN THE BEST OF CONDITIONS, SO IT DOES PAY TO POLLINATE SEVERAL "GIRLS" ON EACH PLANT.



GROWING: PROTECTION

YOUR PRECIOUS SEEDLINGS WILL REQUIRE DILIGENT PROTECTION FROM SPROUT TO HARVEST. PILL BUGS WILL WANT TO EAT YOUR TENDER SPROUTS. EARWIGS AND CATERPILLERS WILL WANT TO DINE ON YOUR TENDER LEAVES. FUNGUS AND MILDEW WILL ATTACK AND RAVAGE IN THE SPACE OF A FEW MOIST NIGHTS. EXPECT THAT YOU WILL LOSE HALF YOUR BLOSSOMS TO ONE OR ANOTHER OF THESE VARMINTS. USE GOOD GROWING PRACTICES TO STEM THE MOLD. USE MILK OR NHEEM OIL TO STOP A FUNGAL OR MOLD INFESTATION. PICK OFF SPENT MALE BLOSSOMS TO RID HARBORING CATERPILLERS. USE DIATOMACEOUS EARTH TO PROTECT YOUNG SPROUTS. HEALTHY PLANTS ARE THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST MOST OF THESE THREATS. REGULAR WATERING WILL KEEP PLANTS FROM BEING STRESSED.

GROWING: HARVEST

THE PATIENT WAIT IS OVER!

THE LONG SUMMER HAS PAST, AND YOUR GOURD PLANTS ARE STARTING TO DECLINE. THE GOURDS ARE BIG AND THE LEAVES ARE YELLOWING AND DYING. IN MOST AREAS OF THE COUNTRY, THE HARVEST BEGINS AFTER THE FIRST FROST. IN MILD AREAS LIKE MINE, IT CAN TAKE SOME TIME TO LET THE STEMS DRY UP, WHICH IS THE INDICATOR OF THE PROPER TIME TO HARVEST. THIS YEAR, THE VINES FINALLY DIED OF POWDERY MILDEW, AND I TURNED THE IRRIGATION OFF ON NOVEMBER 1ST. TIME TO HANG YOUR GOURDS AND LET THEM "CURE." EVEN THOUGH THE PLANT IS DEAD, THE SEEDS AND PULP ARE VERY MUCH ALIVE AND DEVELOPING. IT WILL BE SEVERAL MONTHS UNTIL THE GOURDS DRY COMPLETELY AND ARE READY FOR CLEANING. YOUR GOURD GROWING SEASON IS DONE!



SAFETY:

