



J&L Garden Center

The All Season Gift
and Garden Center

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Harvesting and Curing Gourds

There are three basic types of gourds. **Cucurbita gourd** varieties are for decorations only. They are never eaten. **Lagenaria gourds** are often used as birdhouses, dippers, containers, and for other handicraft projects. **Luffa gourds** are used as sponges. Some varieties of both Lagenaria and Luffa gourds can be eaten when they are green and immature. If in doubt, do not eat any gourds, many are poisonous. Do not eat any squash that may have been cross pollinated with a gourd, these too may be poisonous.



Gourds are ready for harvest when the stems dry and turn brown. Leave them on the vines as long as possible but it is best to harvest gourds before frost. Mature gourds, that have a hardened shell, will survive a light frost, but less developed gourds may be damaged. Do not save immature gourds, they will not store or dry properly.



Gourds should be cut from the vines with a few inches of the stem left attached. Take care not to bruise the gourds during harvest. Bruises increase the likelihood that they will decay during the curing process. Discard any fruit that is rotten, bruised, or immature. After harvesting, all gourds should be cleaned with soap and water. Let them dry and then apply rubbing alcohol to the surface to help remove any fungus or bacteria.

Curing **cucurbita gourds** is a two-step process. They may take from 1 to 6 months to completely dry, depending on the type and size of the gourd. **Surface drying** is the first step in the curing process, and takes approximately one week. Place the clean, dry fruit in a dark, well ventilated area. Arrange the gourds in a single layer and make certain that the fruits do not touch each other. A slatted tray will allow air circulation around the gourds. During this time, the skin hardens and the exterior color of the gourd is set. Check gourds daily and discard any fruit that show signs of decay or mold or any that develop soft spots.



Cucurbita Gourds

Internal drying is the second step in the curing process and takes a minimum of three to four weeks. Keep the gourds in shallow containers. Store them in a dry, warm, well-ventilated area. If any mold appears on the outside skin, wipe it clean with rubbing alcohol, and allow it to continue drying. Discard any gourds that become decayed, shriveled or misshapen. Turn the fruit occasionally to discourage any decay.

The gourd is adequately cured when the gourd becomes light in weight and the seeds can be heard rattling inside. Cured gourds can be painted, waxed or decorated.

Lagenaria gourds will tolerate a light frost, but their

color may be slightly affected if frozen. Lagenaria gourds can be surface cured in the same manner as cucurbita gourds. However, the internal drying process takes much longer for these gourds to fully harden. Some gourds can take up to a year to completely dry internally.



Lagenaria Gourds

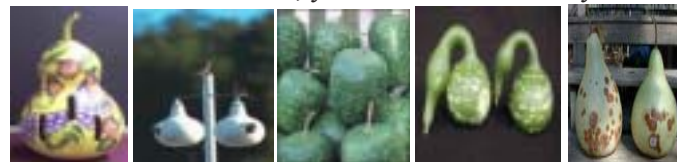
After curing, the surface can be smoothed and polished with very fine steel wool or sandpaper. The hardened shell should be treated with rubbing alcohol, allowed to dry, and then waxed, or shellacked, for the final finish.

Luffa gourds are the source of organic sponges. They have specific harvesting and processing techniques in order to produce high quality sponges. Harvest these gourds when the outer skin is dry and turns yellow or brown. The gourd will be light in weight and the seeds will rattle inside. Luffa can tolerate a light frost, but be sure to remove them before they receive a hard frost. Frozen luffas will just rot, they will not dry properly. You will not be able to harvest and use all the Luffa that are on your vines. Only the completely mature fruit will dry and cure properly, dispose of the rest of them.



Luffa Gourds

Remove the stem end of the gourd and shake out the seeds from the center cavity. Soak the luffa gourds in warm water until the outer skin softens to the point where it can be removed easily. Change the water often if you do not want to stain the internal fibers while they soak. After removing the skin, soak the fibrous sponge in a solution of 2 parts bleach to 8 parts water until you get the creamy-white appearance you want. Rinse in clear water to remove the bleach and allow it to dry before using. You can also use Hydrogen Peroxide, instead of bleach, to lighten the fibers. Once cleaned, you can also color or dye them.



Decorated Gourd Birdhouse Gourds Apple Gourd Swan Gourd Curing Gourds