

Home Gardening Series

# Gourds

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Vegetables

## Environment

**Light** – sunny  
**Soil** – well-drained  
**Fertility** – medium  
**pH** – 5.8 to 7.2  
**Temperature** – warm  
**Moisture** – moist

## Culture

**Planting** – seeds  
**Spacing** – 18 x 6 inches  
**Hardiness** – warm, frost sensitive  
**Fertilizer** – medium

## Gourds – *Cucurbita lagenaria*

“Gourd” is the common name applied to certain warm-season vining crops closely related to pumpkin and squash. The hard-shelled, ornamental fruits are used primarily for fall decorations or for making cooking utensils. Some varieties are eaten when immature. Vining okra is an edible type of luffa gourd. When garden space is limited, gourds can be grown on fences, trellises or stakes.

## Cultural Practices

Plant seeds 1 inch deep and 6 to 12 inches apart. Allow 6 to 8 feet between rows. When seedlings are well established (with one or two true leaves), thin to 2 to 3 feet apart. Plant after the danger of the last frost has passed (usually in mid-April).

Control cucumber beetles with weekly applications of a suggested insecticide from the time plants emerge from the soil.

Keep rows free from weeds by shallow hoeing and cultivation during June and July, when rapid vine growth covers the entire ground. Some gardeners use black polyethylene mulch to warm the soil for better growth and to control weeds.

Utility gourds (dipper, bottle and club varieties) develop the best-shaped fruits. Grow the plants on a fence or trellis so fruit grows long and straight. Some gardeners harvest fruit for eating when immature (less than one week after blossom). The luffa is frequently grown on a support for easy harvesting. The pubescent fruits (covered with fine, soft, hair-like structures) hold soil if allowed to lay on the ground.

Ornamental and utility gourds should mature on the plant until September, when the fruits develop hard, glossy, brightly colored shells. The stems should be quite tough. Harvest with 1 to 2 inches of stem.

Handle gourds carefully. Bruises, scratches or punctures result in discoloration and deterioration. Cure gourds for a few days in the shade under warm, dry conditions. Wash dirty fruits and rinse in a weak bleach solution before drying.

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## Cultivars

Crop	Variety	Days to Maturity	Plants/100 Ft of Row	Sources (see "Sources" paragraph below)	Remarks
Gourds	Ornamental Gourds	120	2 oz	5, 16, 27, 31, 32, 36	Various shapes and sizes; highly colored.
	Bird House	120	2 oz	2, 6, 9, 12, 23, 31, 32, 36	10 to 12 inches in diameter, tapering at stem end; smooth, tan, hard shell.
	Bottle	120	2 oz	2, 4, 23, 32, 36	Uniform in shape with the blossom end being bulbous and beginning of the neck flares out to a smaller bulb.
	Calabash	120	2 oz	36	About 5 inches in diameter with a short, curved neck at stem end; 12 to 15 inches long; smooth, tan color.
	Dipper	120	2 oz	6, 12, 27, 23, 32, 36	Slender neck, usually curved and longer than the bowl; smooth, tan surface.
	Italian	120	2 oz	36	Edible at young stage, becoming hard shelled at maturity.
	Luffa	120	2 oz	2, 6, 12, 27, 31, 36	8 to 12 inches long, sometimes used as a dishcloth, needs a long growing season.
	Speckled Swan	125	2 oz	16, 23, 26	Dark green colored gourd with light green speckles resembles a swan in shape. 10 to 12 inches from neck to base.
	Turk's Turban	95	2 oz	2, 9, 16, 36	Great decorator gourd. Brightly colored red-orange buttercup type squash with blossom end striped silver, green and white.
	Caveman's Club	125	2 oz	9, 16	12- to 18-inch gourd with oblong, deeply veined club and a narrow handle or neck. Dark green colored, with some light green streaking. Needs to grow on trellis to produce straight neck.
	Apple	110	2 oz	9, 16, 23	Apple-shaped gourd, dark green with light green speckles. Dries brown.

After curing, the fruits of brightly colored ornamental varieties may be polished with a dry cloth and waxed or dipped in shellac.

Utility gourds require additional drying for extended periods in a warm, dry room. Hang gourds on wires until thoroughly dry. When the seeds rattle, the gourds are dry. They may then be made into dippers, plant containers, pipes, birdhouses, wastepaper baskets, etc.

Zucco gourds are harvested before killing frosts and stored for fall use. Some cooks use the thick flesh in soups and stews. Harvest luffa gourds after

a hard frost. When dry, the outer surface can be easily removed. Cut off both ends, shake out the seeds and free the center "sponge core" by cutting lengthwise halfway through the gourd. The resulting rectangular sponge may be used as a scouring pad, bathing sponge, inner soles for shoes and other purposes.

### Sources

For a list of sources referred to by number, request FSA6106, *Seed Sources: Vegetable and Herb*, for current address, telephone and web site.

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