

Gourds

Gourd growers in Northwest Iowa are beginning the task of picking some gourds and leaving others on the vine in preparation for winter. Some growers pick gourds now, hang them in the garage, basement or an attic room to dry. Others leave them outside to winter over and dry on the vine.

I pick them, hang some in my garage and green peel some. When I say green peel, I use a paring knife to take the green skin off, then hang them in the basement or attic room to dry. When you green peel them, they don't mold like they do if you leave the outside skin on during the drying process. I don't like to clean moldy gourds so if I have the time and space I green peel most of them.

Gourds are approximately 92 percent water so it takes a few months for them to dry completely. If you've green peeled them, they dry quicker. With the skin gone, the water can escape faster.

Gourds will mold if left outside all winter; it's a natural process. The snow and spring rains will wash a lot of the outer skin off making them easier to clean. When cleaning gourds I use a scouring pad, bleach or sometimes just hot soapy water depending on the condition of the gourds.

One gourd grower had their garage full of moldy gourds. Her husband was cleaning the garage in the spring and thought the gourds had rotted. Out they went into his burn pile. A season of gourds were burnt up before she found out they were gone. Let everyone that will be around your gourds know they will mold but they are still very useful once they're cleaned.

What do we do with all those gourds? Gourds come in numerous shapes and sizes. They can be used in arrangements, both mini arrangements and large arrangements, depending on the size and variety of gourds you've grown. There are gourd artists that make sculptures, purses, vases, jewelry, holiday decorations and many other items out of gourds. They can be painted, stained, bleached and dyed to be used in many different ways.

Try experimenting with growing gourds next year. You don't need a lot of space, You can grow them on the ground, on a fence or arbor. Choose your growing space and the size of gourds you want to grow. Start them from seed in the house in the spring and you'll have plenty in the fall to keep and share with others. Gourds are truly a treasure that can be used by everyone for many purposes.

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Don & Bev Kelder put out an excellent book on gourds in 2000 titled From Vine to Design, printed by NGC. (It's probably not available anymore.)