

Gourd Tips

compiled by Peggy Jarred

Various people contributed to these tips and are based on their personal experience and some suggestions will differ from others because there are many possible solutions to a situation. Don't be afraid to try more than one suggestion and decide for yourself which one you like best.

Dry gourds off the ground. If you leave them setting directly on the ground they become prey to insects which will eat holes in them, including termites, and mice and rats will also chew holes in your gourds and eat the seeds within.

There are a few basics to know. First, **start with a dry gourd**. Different shapes will lend themselves to different projects so find a gourd that will be the best for the project you will be working on.

Next you will need to **clean the gourd**. Why do you need to clean it?

Because the dried mold and skin will flake off eventually if you try to paint over it.

So to clean you wet down the gourd and then scrub the skin and mold off. A copper scrubber works well, plus a knife and small wire brush for the stem. Have tried both Chore Boy brand and the cheaper off brands, but I like Chore Boy best. It doesn't fall apart like the cheaper brands do.

To wet the gourd you can just place it in a sink full of water and turn the gourd over a few times letting it soak for 1/2 hr. or more depending on the skin.

Remember, cleaning is a messy job and you may not want to use the kitchen sink. I am lucky enough to have a laundry tub to use when cleaning in the house. If it's warm outside you may want to find a large tub to use or another method you can try on a nice sunny day is to put the gourd or gourds in a black plastic bag. Spray in some water and close it up. Let it sit in the sun for a couple of hours and then work on cleaning them. The secret is to get the skin good and soft. If you are having rainy weather or using a sprinkler to water the lawn, just place your gourd out in the lawn and let it get wet that way.

When the skin is softened it is time to clean your gourd. I like to use rubber gloves when I am doing this. I've talked to some people that have broken out in a rash because they were allergic to the moldy skin.

Take your scrubby and start rubbing all over the gourd. Use the wire brush on the stem and on the bottom where the blossom was. Sometimes you need to use a knife for stubborn areas. When everything is cleaned off let the gourd dry before working on it.

When going through the cleaning process you will sometimes find a gourd that has a soft spot. That means the shell is very thin in that area and may not be worth keeping. Sometimes parts of the gourd can be salvaged and used as pieces in other projects. (marthsgourds.com)

For cleaning the outside of a gourd, (my LEAST favorite chore!) fill a large container (small trash can, bucket, etc.) with potting soil! Make sure every inch of the gourd is covered and leave it buried 2-3 days. Then take it outside with your copper scrubbie, rinse it off with the garden hose, and all that gunk comes off quite easily with barely any effort! I was wishing this method would work for the inside as well, but no such luck! (my attempt at that was a total disaster...) But, you never know until you try, right? (Evie Schinber)

For the inside, I use my special tool to remove all the "chads" - you know the little pieces that hang on after you drill. My special tool is a round toilet bowl brush. It just fits into my opening and does a great job smoothing the interior.

Fixing mistakes, cracks, holes

Gourd saw dust can be mixed with Elmer's glue and used to fill small holes in the gourd or fill cracks. Mix enough glue and dust to make a paste thick enough to work, fill your hole and smooth as best you can. When completely dry it may be sanded and painted or stained like your gourd. (Barbs Gamel)

Repairing Cracks in Gourds

It is frustrating to pick up a beautiful gourd only to discover that it has an insect hole, stress crack or other flaw. It's even more frustrating to drop a half-finished gourd and discover that it is broken! If the damage is severe, you may not be able to complete the project exactly as intended; but almost any break can be repaired or at least disguised so you can salvage the gourd.

Small insect holes can be easily filled with wood putty, but cracks will require a bit more work to fix. Drill a small hole at the far ends of the crack before repairing. This hole will prevent the crack from spreading further. Next, add some glue to the crack. You can use wood glue, Weldbond or a gap filling super glue, but you'll want to force the glue thoroughly into all areas of the crack. Once the crack is full, force some gourd dust into the glue mixture. This will make the crack less noticeable after it is sanded. You may have to clamp the repair with some masking tape or duct tape while the glue dries. The closer together you can bring the edges of the crack, the better the repair will look.

When gluing two or more gourd pieces together, painter's tape is an excellent way to hold the pieces together until the glue dries. Painter's tape is designed to be easily removed and will not leave an adhesive residue or cause discolorations on your gourd.

Instead of erasers or baby wipes use 1 part Murphy Oil Soap to 10 parts of water to wipe off pencil or graphite marks. Mix in a spray bottle, spray the gourd, and wipe off with a rag or paper towel. This also conditions the gourd. (Lorrie Ferris)

Sanding Gourds

For sanding on a gourd ~ inside and out ~ instead of sandpaper I use drywall screen. I've found that C-80 is the best ~ anything with a bigger weave can (will!) scratch the gourd. It comes in separate 9" x 11" sheets (less than \$1!) at Ace Hardware, or small packets at Home Depot or Lowe's. I just cut a piece about half as big as my hand and find it very easy to work with! It's very inexpensive and a little goes a long way!

(Evie Scribner)

Glues

Stick Fast - instant CA adhesive – purchased at Woodcraft

Beacon Fabric-Tac - Permanent Adhesive – purchased at Joann's Fabrics

Finishes/Sealers for use on Gourd Projects

Birdhouses (the following was taken from a blog on the web-question was how to protect your birdhouse gourds from the elements when hung outside)

For painting gourds for exterior use, I suggest a high gloss oil based paint. –

I live in a valley in rural Pennsylvania and I don't recommend leaving gourds outside during the months where freezing is possible. My bird houses and feeders are painted with acrylics and coated with 3 coats of Delta Ceramcoat Gloss Exterior/Interior varnish. It is about 0.88 for a 2oz bottle and I get it in Walmart. The first coat soaks in, but the next two coats go on easily and the luster is wonderful! It makes the colors of the paints and the gourd markings just pop out. I only hang gourd houses or feeders where there is good air circulation and where they won't be constantly bumped and scratched by branches. This prevents the sealer from being scratched or chipped and water cannot get in to cause problems. I have had no problem with peeling, rot, mold, or fading of colors.

I live in Oregon where it rains all winter and I use Minwax indoor/outdoor Helman par urethane clear gloss and it coats great. It protects from sunlight rain/moisture and temperature change that gourd is protected like Fort Knox. It needs to be because I use acrylic paint on my birdhouse gourds. I also drill holes in the bottom of my gourds so if any moisture does get in it will drain out the bottom.

If your birdhouse is going to be used outdoors, try using Spar Varnish on them instead of a water-based sealer. The Spar Varnish is meant for outdoor use and is pretty tough. If you are in a location with severe winters, though, it is a good idea to take the birdhouse down and rehang it in the spring. Hope this helps. I live in the mountains of North Carolina. I have left some birdhouses out all year -- and they stand up fine. –

I have had the same problems with birdhouses --- I now no longer paint my birdhouses at all or if I do, I warn the purchaser that they probably will not stay pristine if used outside in this climate---I now burn designs and seal with either mineral oil or wax (Johnson's Paste Wax usually, sometimes shoe polish wax). Both must be renewed in the spring---but obviously they do not peel off. --

Gail, I do the same thing. Woodburn then two coats of paste wax, I put a handout in each explaining how to care for it, re waxing after a rain etc., I couldn't find anything that would stand up, the painted ones were a mess after one season. -- Rhoda, Northeastern BC

I found a sealer to use on outdoor gourds, it is made by Minwax and it is called "Outdoor Clear Shield". It says it has "advanced ultraviolet absorber" I don't know about how that works but I have tested a piece of burned gourd, half with and half without. It has been outside for about 6 months now and the coated part is holding up very well, the uncoated portion has faded substantially. -- Jenn in PA

I too had problems with the regular poly peeling. It didn't matter what was under it; from the bare gourd to acrylic paint. It peeled all over. I now use a water based Spar finish on my outdoor gourds. (SeaFin AquaSpar) It was kind of hard to find and is expensive, but it works wonderfully! I haven't had a single problem with it and we have weeks of rain then HOT weather to contend with. Like now, it was in the 90's for a week then overnight it dropped down to being in the 60's. It is holding up great so far. I also take my outdoor gourds in for the winter and advise others to do the same. So I'm not sure how it would hold up under winter outdoor conditions. One more note. I was told repeatedly that any of the "oil" (or whatever) based spars will yellow. The water based ones won't. --TC in Oregon

Jo Sonja's Polyurethane varnish is a heavy duty varnish with great durability. It has a urethane resin that gives strong resilience for protecting your projects. It works great on gourd art. Unlike other brands you only need 2 coats on most projects, dries clear, will not crack or turn yellow. Best stored and used between 65-80 degrees. Water based and non-toxic, contains low VOC's. Can be used with a sponge, brush or spray gun. I recommend dabbing it on with a foam wedge. Clean up with soap and water

Triple Thick – brush on Gloss Glaze – cleans up with soap and water Made by DecoArt – purchase at most craft supply stores

After painting the exterior of your gourd with a base coat color, spray on a light coat of matte varnish prior to painting on your design. Then if you need to remove or correct your design, the base coat will be protected. When your design is completed, spray the whole gourd with clear varnish, or your choice of finishes. (Carolyn Spaltro)

Sealers for the interior

To waterproof a gourd to use as a vase or planter use Apoxie Paste. Heat up the product and it becomes a batter like consistency that you can actually color with a bit of paint. Spread the "goop" with your hand over the whole interior of the gourd. Make sure to seal the outside with an outdoor varnish.

To waterproof a gourd – Warm the gourd in a barely hot oven so the hot wax doesn't hit a cold gourd and will insure the paraffin goes all the way into the crevasses on the inside of the gourd. Then I melt the paraffin according to the directions on the box, making sure to only let it just melt and not more since paraffin is flammable. I pour the paraffin into the gourd and seal it tightly with a cork. I use a metal coffee can that I have pinched to make a spout to heat the paraffin and pour it into the gourd. Once sealed, I start shaking the gourd and shaking the gourd and shaking the gourd. It takes a while, but at some point, maybe 15 to 20 minutes, there is a very different sound as the paraffin starts to solidify. It is at that point that you can unseal it and pour the extra paraffin back into the can. It isn't a difficult process just time consuming. A hot gourd will increase the time, so a warm gourd is better. Barbara Whitbeck

Wood Burning

When burning on your gourd try for 3 colors. The first time you burn the design it is light when you go over it the next time start adding a little darker in shadows and recessions. As you go over the pattern several times it takes on a darker appearance and places can become lighter as you add the depth where needed. You cannot just burn dark the first time and achieve depth and dimension to your work. (Barbs Gamel)

Tips and tricks for your next pyrography project- Lora Irish

1. **The speed of your stroke determines the darkness of your burned line.** The burner tip should just caress the surface of your wood. A smooth, flowing stroke will create a light to medium burn. A slow stroke will create a darker burn.
2. **Keep the tip of your woodburner as clean as possible.** As you work, carbon builds up on the tip, causing even light, smooth burn strokes to become black. Clean your tip often using the manufacturer's recommended method.
3. **If you have a variable temperature control woodburner, use as low a setting as possible for each area.** You can always darken an area, but it's a lot harder to lighten it. For burners with only one temperature, use the tool just as it begins to heat up for the very lightest areas of the project. As the tool reaches its final temperature, move onto the darker areas. To go back to the lighter areas, unplug your burner for a few minutes.
4. **Flow with the direction of the element or object that you are burning.** If you are burning a fence rail, your strokes should follow the length of the board creating the grain lines of the wood.
5. **Transfer only the pattern lines that you really need to establish the design to the wood.** Burning over pencil lines sets the pencil into the work, so you may not be able to erase them when the project is complete.
6. **Work the design from the background to the foreground, when possible.** It's easier to burn in the foreground over a background area.
7. **Develop each area in layers, working from the lightest tones to the darkest.**
8. **Shadowing creates a three-dimensional feeling in a scene or still-life.**
9. **Use texturing to distinguish one element from another.** A dappled or spotted stroke works well for tree leaves, but old barn boards should be done with long line strokes to imply wood grain.
10. **The number of finely-burned lines that you place in one area can determine how light or dark an area becomes.** The more lines that you burn; the darker the area will appear.
11. **Practice creating as many tonal values, line patterns, and texture patterns as you can on a scrap piece of birch plywood.** Use this board as a reference while burning.
12. **A heavy ceramic floor tile makes a good hot plate for your wood burning tool between strokes.**
13. **Shadows become darker as the elements come closer to you.** Distant backgrounds, such as mountains behind a barn scene, are paler in tonal value than those found in the barn. A tree in the foreground, in front of the barn, is darker yet.
14. **Don't outline everything in the design!** Outlining should be used only where you have problems distinguishing one area from another. A beautiful, well-developed burning can be turned into a coloring book image by the over-use of outlines!

Carbon buildup on the tip affects the temperature of the tip. Lora S. Irish's website, www.carvingpatterns.com, has terrific wood burning tips and advises you to lay fine grit sandpaper on a glazed tile surface and quickly pull the tip across the paper. It not only removes the carbon, but also sharpens the tip.

To clean tips for solid-state units, ALWAYS consult the instructions that come with the unit or where you purchased it. Lora's technique may be recommended or you may be instructed to use special honing compounds with a strop. Be aware that sharpening does thin the metal of the wire-tipped style of pens, which makes them burn hotter.

SueWalters.com - Sue recommends using a tea strainer to clean tips of a wood burner

Tool preferences

For my use with gourds, I prefer Proxxon tools: sander, saw (large and small), I see the Caning shop in Berkley has a set with all tools. My only problem was not ordering extra blades for the mini saw.

Other than that, I use the scrapers from the kitchen!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (Margie Jordan, Salem, OR)

SUPPLIES

I prefer the Hobbylinc, INSTA-CURE+ cyanoacrylate (Hobbylinc.com) for glue. Expensive but takes very little for the smaller 'glue' projects. (Margie Jordan Salem, OR)

MISCELLENOUS

When threading a needle, use a small piece of paper folded around the yarn or thread, this will allow the yarn/thread to easily go through the eye of the needle. (Veletta Murphy)

To condition pine needles prior to using, soak in 1 tsp glycerin to 1 quart of water for 30 minutes. Liquid fabric softener can also be used in place of the glycerin. (Peggy Jarred)

Suppliers

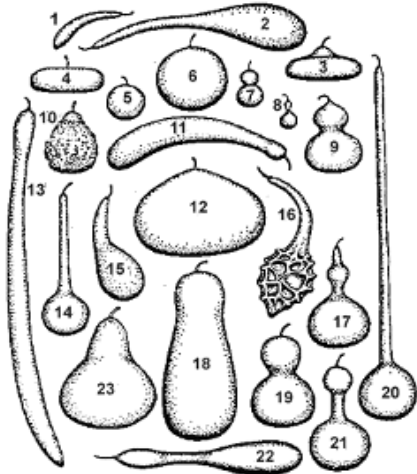
Local – Boise Area

Quality Arts – Garden City – General Art supplies
The Tole Shed – Kuna
Woodcrafters –Boise
Tandy Leather –Boise
Hobby Lobby - Meridian

Online

Americangourdsociety.org
arizonagourds.com
dickblick.com
gourdartenthusiasts.com
welburngourdfarm.com
wuertzfarm.com
miriamjoy.com

Gourd Shapes Identification Chart



Original line drawing by Timothy Moyers.

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|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Banana | 13. Baton, Snake, Longissima |
| 2. Club, Cave Man's Club | 14. Short Handled Dipper |
| 3. Tobacco Box, Sugar Bowl | 15. Powder Horn, Penguin |
| 4. Canteen, Sugar Bowl | 16. French Dolphin, Maranka, Monkey |
| 5. Cannon Ball | 17. Lump in the neck Bottle |
| 6. Basketball | 18. Zucca |
| 7. Mini-bottle | 19. Chinese Bottle |
| 8. Sennari | 20. Long Handled Dipper |
| 9. Mexican Bottle | 21. Indonesian Bottle, Costa Rican Bottle |
| 10. Hardshell Warty | 22. Japanese Bottle, Siphon |
| 11. Hercules Club | 23. Kettle |
| 12. Bushel Basket | |