

HOW TO CLEAN A GOURD

Cleaning the Exterior of the Gourd

All you really need to clean dried gourds are a non scratching Teflon pan cleaner such as a chore boy or a copper scrubbing ball, some warm water and dish detergent. For your safety we recommend you wear kitchen-type rubber gloves and a dust mask or respirator and work outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.

Step 1. Soak the gourd for 30 minutes (cover with a wet towel: put in a tub of water or scatter them on your lawn and run the sprinkler)

Step 2. Wearing gloves and a face mask, use the scrubbie and liquid dish detergent to scrub the gourd surface.

- You want to scrub hard enough to clean off the mold and dry skin, but not hard enough to leave scratches on the gourd's surface.
- Sometimes the mold is a thin and tough white film that is very stubborn and hard to remove. Soak the gourd longer and try again.
- If there still is mold on the gourd, you can use a sander, or carefully try a small knife or other "sharp" tool to scrape it off.

Step 3. Once you have scrubbed away the mold and skin just rinse your gourd and allow it to re-dry. You are now ready to craft!

Step 4. Sand the outside of the gourd after it has been cleaned to be certain that 100% of the skin has been removed. Use a sanding block (sponge shaped with different grits), wet or dry sand paper, orbital sander, or a mini sander. Start with a 80 grit paper and then change to higher numbers to get a very smooth gourd (if you want that).

Alternative methods

- **Pressure washing** – have been used successfully by some people to clean fully dried, thick-walled gourds. Caution is necessary because water under pressure can break a thin gourd. You also need to place the gourds in a wire cage or deep tub to keep them from flying across the yard when the spray hits the gourd.
- **Green cleaning** – Even when gourds are still green the shell is still very hard. Caution: don't pick gourds before they have finished growing...they will shrivel up. Removal of the skin during this stage of the gourds growth can be difficult. Green cleaning is done by using a sharp or semi sharp edge of metal and scraping the skin off by holding a sharp blade at a steep angle and shaving the skin off.
Once the majority of the skin is removed, use a copper Chore-boy, and while under running water, scrub the surface to remove any remaining rice paper thin remnants of skin. Thin layers of skin remaining on the gourd will cause a difference in drying uniformity and will leave color marks. Watch these gourds for a few weeks for signs of mold. You can wipe them as needed with a dilute bleach solution on a cloth. These gourds are a pale yellow/tan without any mold markings when fully dry.
- **Rot cleaning** – Another way to hasten the curing process and achieve a light tan gourd without ant mold markings is to rot clean the gourd. Preparation: cut a hole in the green, but fully grown, gourd. The hole can be small (if it is big enough for the seeds to come out) or fully opened like a bowl. Carefully poke around the inside of the gourd with a piece of wire (coat hanger) or a skewer so that the water can get fully into the interior of the gourd – don't poke holes in the gourd though!

Submerge the gourd in a barrel or tub of water and place a lid on the tub. Note: Fill the tub to the very top so the entire gourd is under water. After 3 weeks you will dump out the guts and smelly water and re-soak in clean water, this time for 2 weeks. Be aware: this method really stinks. When you dump out the water and guts, do it in a remote area because it smells horribly. A "newer" method of rot cleaning calls for soaking the gourds for 5 days at a time, and pulling them out of the water and removing what will easily remove, then put fresh water in the bucket and re-submerge the gourd in the bucket. Repeat the process every 5 days until the gourd is cleaned out and only the shell remains. This cuts down on the smell a lot.

Cleaning the Interior of the Gourd

If you are making a birdhouse, bowl, vase candle holder etc, with the dried gourd you probably want to clean out the papery interior and remove the seeds. Caution: Wear a face mask or respirator to prevent the breathing in of gourd dust which can be harmful. When using power tools, wearing safety glasses or a safety visor is also recommended.

- Step 1. Cut the gourd to suit your intended use. Realize that the smaller the opening the more challenging it will be to clean out the gourd. Birds don't mind it if there is paper and seeds inside. They use it to add to their nest.
- Step 2. Use a long-handled object to scrape out the insides of the gourd. There are a variety of shapes and sizes of scrapers that can be purchased, but you can also use a spoon, screw driver and/or other objects to get the stuff out of the gourd.
 - If there is a large, hard seed ball inside the gourd you will have to poke and stab at it to break it into pieces small enough to remove through your gourd hole. You can also fill the gourd with warm water and let it soak for 30 minutes and the seed ball will be easy to break apart and remove. It will take several hours for the gourd to dry out after using the wet method.
- Step 3. For bowls you will want to sand the inside of the gourd with a tool that will evenly smooth out the shell of the gourd. Tools such as the Gourd Ball cleaner, Mushroom Tool, and various sanding tools do this nicely.