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Drying and Preserving Gourds

Michigan State University Extension-Oakland County

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Gourds come in many different sizes, shapes and colors. Stokes Seeds, Inc. lists about 14 different types of small gourds and five types of large gourds.

Part of the success of preserving gourds relates to the maturity of the fruits when they are harvested. The fruits of the small types normally mature satisfactorily most years in the southern portion of lower Michigan, but fruits of the larger types often don't. Most of the small types are used only during the fall and can be kept for a few weeks. It is much more difficult, however, to preserve large specimens because they often don't mature sufficiently.

Gardeners who want to grow and preserve large specimens may want to use certain techniques that may help the fruits mature such as warming the soil by covering it with black plastic a couple of weeks before planting, using a black plastic mulch, using row or plant covers or protectors early in the season, allowing only one or two fruits to develop on each plant, and protecting the vines from frost in the fall to extend the growing season. There may also be a difference in the length of the growing season required for the various types, but most seed catalogs don't include this information. Figure on at least 130 days for the

larger types.

Fruits of the larger types are ready to harvest when the skin is hard and the stem is dry and brown. It is best to harvest before a hard frost. Leave a few inches of stem attached to the fruit. Handling them carefully to avoid bruising or scratching the skin.

Clean by wiping with a soft cloth dampened with rubbing alcohol, Lysol, a solution of vinegar and water, or a borax solution (2T/ quart of water).

The fruits are now ready to be dried and the drying process takes place in two stages: surface drying and final drying.

Surface Drying-Remove surface moisture by spreading the gourds out in a single layer in a dry, well-ventilated room such as a shed, porch or garage. Don't let gourds touch each other and turn them each day. If placed on newspapers, replace them daily. Remove any fruits that develop soft spots or that shrivel. Surface drying takes about a week. During this time, the outer skin hardens and the color sets.

Final Drying-An additional 3 to 4 weeks is needed for final drying. Spread gourds out in single layers in a warm, dark, dry, airy location such as an attic. Check the fruits every few days and remove any that start to rot. They may become covered with a mold or crust at this time which is normal, so keep those. Turn the fruits occasionally. The gourds that dry properly will be light in weight and the seeds will rattle.



After the fruits have finished drying, wash them in warm water and use steel wool to remove the mold and crust. Dry them with a soft rag. When completely dry, they can be sanded and polished. Then enjoy them with their natural finish. Properly dried gourds should retain their color for 3 to 4 months. Waxing the surface with a floor paste wax may extend the time before the color fades. Gourds can also be stained or dyed, varnished or painted. They can also be decorated by using a wood burning tool.

Would you like additional information?

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Distributed by MSU Extension-Oakland County, 1200 N. Telegraph Road, Pontiac, MI 48341, 248/858-0880, <http://www.oakgov.com/msu>. Reviewed by Charlene Molnar, Horticulture Advisor, September 2013.

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