



What's in your gourd?

No display of harvest produce would be complete without a selection of gourds among the pumpkins, squash, grapes and corn, and yet they will never appear as part of any Thanksgiving dinner.

Gourds are considered by many to be the oldest type of plant cultivated by man, but since we don't eat them, why would people go to great lengths to harvest them?

Gourds are in the same plant family as pumpkins or squashes, but the flesh of the fruit is so bitter that they are considered inedible. They're not poisonous, though, and some native American tribes did eat the seeds or use them in medicines.

The outer shell of a gourd is very strong and thin, so gourds can be used to make a number of useful things, such as bowls, spoons or bottles, that ancient people would have otherwise had to learn how to make pottery to provide. Gourds can also be used

to make musical instruments, from simple rattles and drums to stringed instruments.

The word "gourd" refers to the live fruit before it is dried and to the entire plant that produces that fruit.

Because of their vibrant colours, variety of shapes and sizes, and smooth to gnarly textures, gourds are now commonly used in centrepieces and decorative displays in fall. Bottle gourds are also used to make birdhouses which appeal to wrens and are especially popular with purple martins when grouped together. These are large orange gourds that have very thin shells.

When dried, the shell of a gourd has a wooden appearance and texture, varying from paper thin to over an inch in thickness. To find out if the gourd is properly dry so it can be used to make something, lift it and shake it. If it is light, and it rattles, it means the seeds are loose and the inside flesh that holds them to the skin has dried out and the gourd can be used for a craft project.



FAT CAT® JOKES

Q. What do you get when you cross an elephant with a fish?

A. Swimming trunks!

Q. Why is it hard to play cards in the jungle?

A. There are too many cheetahs!

Q. What does a kitten become after it's 3 days old?

A. 4 days old!

Q. What do you give an elephant with big feet?

A. Plenty of room!

Safety tips for using gourds

- Wear a disposable breathing mask, safety goggles, an apron and cover your hair when cutting, drilling or sanding gourds. Fine dust is created by these processes and you don't want to breathe it in or get it in your eyes.
- Wear disposable latex gloves when handling gourds and throw them out when you're done.
- Never use soft gourds or ones that show signs of mold.
- Work in a well-ventilated area or outside if possible.
- Put all your outer clothing into the washer as soon as you're done.



Painted Gourd Ornaments

You can decorate these small globe gourds with a Halloween or Thanksgiving theme for this season, with a Christmas theme to hang on your tree or just make them bright and colourful to use anytime you want!

First, put on:

- disposable breathing mask
- latex gloves
- apron and shower cap

Then assemble:

- a small smooth gourd
- acrylic paints
- paint brushes
- paint sealant (optional)
- 30 cm of thin ribbon
- upholstery needle
- a large nail

Don't forget:

- a parent to help!



Instructions

1. Ask your parent to pierce the gourd with the nail just below the stem, all the way through both sides.
2. Paint the whole gourd white as a base for other colours, or you may want to let the natural gourd colour show through.
3. When the base coat is dry, paint any design you choose.
4. When the paint is dry, ask your parent to spray the gourd with sealant if you want a shiny finish like the ones in the picture.
5. When that's dry, thread the ribbon into the upholstery needle, then feed the ribbon through the hole and tie the ends together.

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