

Gourd Rattle (Gourd Crafting Project)

By *Debbie Starnes*

Date: Unknown

Several gourd shapes may be used for this simple musical instrument. For example, a short handle dipper provides its own handle while a canteen gourd provides a nice, relatively flat surface on which to place a design. Any gourd with enough space to rattle some objects and strong enough to withstand the shaking will work.

Select a gourd and unless your gourd has its own natural handle, a stick or dowel rod will work for the handle. Cut two holes on the opposite ends of your gourd for the handle to pass through. A drill or Dremel tool works well for this. The holes need only be slightly larger than the handle otherwise you will lose your rattle's contents.

Clean as much of the seed and pulp out of your gourd as possible. Then to put the "rattle" in your gourd, buy a bag of old fashioned popcorn (not the microwave variety). Pebbles will also work. Experiment putting different amounts of the corn or pebbles in your rattle until you obtain the desired sound effect.

One way to assemble the rattle is to drill two small holes through the handle just large enough to poke a small dowel rod on either side of the gourd and very close to the gourd. Allow the small dowel to extend past the holes you made for the gourd's handle and this will keep the gourd in place. Another way to affix the gourd to the handle would be to glue a strip of narrow leather to the handle on either side of the gourd thus preventing the gourd from sliding up and down on the handle. If you have chosen a stick for a handle, you may be able to use the shape of the stick itself to hold the gourd in place on one end. If you have used a dipper gourd with its own handle, you may opt simply to make a single hole to remove some of the gourd contents and insert additional corn or pebbles to increase the noise it makes. You would then just need to cork the hole to complete your rattle.

Decorate your rattle in the style you like. Some ideas would be to wrap the stick handle in leather or fur and tie on with sinew. You may thread beads or shells on the sinew or add additional leather strips on the handle end to embellish it or add feathers. You may want to add feathers or horsehair to the top of your gourd rattle. These may be held in place by a strip of leather wound around the top portion of the handle protruding from the gourd and then glued on. Additionally, the gourd may be painted or wood burned or left natural. A coat of acrylic spray will help protect your painted design.

As you can imagine, a wide variety of gourd rattles may be produced with these basic instructions. I hope you will enjoy making your own gourd rattles!