

## **Saving Gourd Seeds**

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Saving gourd seeds for the future can become another very interesting pastime. Seeds extracted from gourds can be used for crafting projects or future plantings. Seeds saved for crafting purposes have been used to make necklaces, or replicate shingles on a decorated gourd birdhouse, among other ideas. The seeds can be dyed, painted, or used in their natural appearances.

If you want to save seeds to replant for another gourd crop, the first thing to remember is that seeds may not produce the same type of gourd they have been extracted from. In essence, if you save seed from a long handle dipper gourd, and that gourd was grown in open pollination around and with other hardshell (*lagenaria siceraria*) gourds, there is a good chance the gourd has been cross pollinated. Thus, the seeds from it may produce a gourd that is a combination of those grown. Of course, this may yield some very interesting shapes of gourds, which some artists and crafters really enjoy. If you desire to get the long handle dipper again from the extracted seed, the gourds need to be grown in isolation. Some folks recommend isolation by at least ~ mile away from other hardshell gourds, while others comment that they need to be at least 1 mile away. The main thing to remember about open pollination is that the insects carry the pollen from one gourd patch to another.

Hand pollination requires using little nets (some folks make little nets from panty hose/stockings) placed around the male and female blooms prior to the blooms opening. When the blooms open, YOU must bring the pollen from several male blooms to the female blooms and then replace the nets on the pollinated female blooms.

The seeds saved should be extracted from a fresh season gourd for best germination rate. This can be done approximately a month after the mature gourd is harvested. Simply cut the gourd open and remove the seeds from the pulp by washing them in as many changes of water as necessary. Rubber gloves are recommended as the wet pulp can be very irritating. In this method the gourd shell will probably shrivel and not be good for crafting.

Spread the cleaned seeds on shallow trays or screens to dry. Stir them frequently to keep them from sticking together. When they are dry enough for storage, they will break in two with a 'snap'. Once they are 'snapped' and broken open, the germ inside should be fairly tight against the shell. If there are voids or air pockets within the germ, chances are, the seed will not germinate. If the seeds bend, or are too soft, more drying is required. This can be done by placing in cloth bags and hanging in a warm dry place, shaking the bag periodically.

The gourd can be allowed to dry, and this allows you to cut the shell so it can be used for craft purposes. In this case, the seeds still need to be cleaned by separating from the pulp and each other. You may want to wear a mask as well as rubber gloves as the dry pulp can also be irritating. Germination rate may be lower than extracting seeds from a fresh gourd.

To store thoroughly dry seeds, label with date and variety, and put them in a cool dark place. The desired humidity for seed storage is generally around 14%. Store them out of direct sunlight and avoid high temperatures. Cold storage, such as refrigerators and freezers, is recommended by some. The main idea is to keep them in dry and low humidity conditions. This should keep them viable for 4 to 6 years. Hardshell gourd seeds have been discovered at Indian burial sites and have still been viable after many years, and have produced heirloom gourds.

Give gourd seed saving a try. Experiment with some of your own seeds and methods. This context is of our own knowledge and experience.