

We want to thank all of you who are growing gourds for Birdsong. We are planning a workshop in the spring (date to be determined) to make your gourds into birdhouses. Here are instructions to harvest and cure the gourds over the winter months.

Harvesting Ornamental Gourds

- Your gourds are ready for harvesting when the stems dry out and turn brown.
- Cut the gourds with a few inches of stem intact.
- Harvest all gourds before a hard frost. Even a light frost can alter the color of hard skin gourds and affect their ability to dry.
- Discard bruised and spoiled gourds as they will begin to decay in storage. We harvested a few gourds with some chew marks and they are doing just fine. As long as the skin is still hard they should be fine to cure.

Curing Ornamental Gourds

Curing or drying ornamental gourds requires time. The outside of the gourd must dry completely and then it will take another several months for the inside of the gourd to dry and cure.

1. Start by cleaning the surface of the gourds with soapy water and allow them to air dry. You can wipe them with rubbing alcohol to further ensure the surface dries completely.
2. Place in a well-ventilated area away from direct sunlight, for about 1 week. The skin will begin to harden and change color. After a week, the outside of the gourd should be well dried.
3. Move the gourds to a well-ventilated, dark area where they can remain for at least 6 months. Spread them in a single layer and **be sure none of the gourds are touching each other**. Allow for air flow under the gourds by placing them on a screen or vented surface. It may be easier to **hang larger gourds for drying**. I have hung mine with twine from a nail on the floor joists in my basement. See image.
4. Check your gourds every day or two and discard any that begin to decay, shrivel or get soft. If mold appears (see image) see if you can wipe it off with a dry cloth or one dipped in bleach.
5. If the gourd is still hard, it should be fine. Drying gourds is not a pretty process.
6. Turn the fruit every couple of weeks, to dry evenly and prevent rotting.
7. When the gourds become light and solidly hard and you can hear the seeds rattling inside when you shake them, they are ready for use. At this time you can carve, paint, wax, shellac or decorate your ornamental gourds any way you wish. Hard-shell gourds may still be rough or peeling and can be smoothed and polished up with steel wool or fine sandpaper They should last indefinitely.



Source: [About.com Home Gardening](https://www.about.com/home-gardening)