

## Saving Gourd Seed

Following a successful gourd growing season, it is a good idea to consider saving seed for the next season. This is very easy thing to do. There are a few things to take into consideration and a number of simple steps to follow.

### **Pure or Cross Pollinated**

First, it is important to understand what variety of seed is being saved, or if that seed can be considered to be a unique variety at all. If only a single variety of a pure and true-to-type seed were planted, the resulting seed will also be pure, provided that no one in the immediate vicinity has also planted gourds. This seed can be still be considered as pure.

If more than one variety of true-to-type gourd seed were planted, the resulting seed can only be considered pure if the specific gourds from which they are taken were hand pollinated and protected from natural pollination. If the gourds were allowed to pollinate freely and naturally, the resulting seed cannot be considered to be true. Gourd plants easily cross pollinate. The resulting seed could well produce a significant percentage of "true-to-type" gourds, or it could just as easily produce substantial numbers of unique gourds, the result of the genetic changes introduced from the cross pollination of the previous gourd growing season. Those "true-to-type" gourds still cannot be considered to be pure. Once gourds are allowed cross pollinate, it can take several years (generations) for a grower to bring them back to a reliable "true" state. There is no way to accurately predict the results of what the next year's crop will be, with regard to the specific shape of the gourd. There is nothing "wrong" with the seed, and it can certainly be saved and planted the following season. There will be nothing at all "wrong" with the gourds produced by these seeds, but it is important to understand that they will not be "true".

Many people don't concern themselves with maintaining the trueness of the gourd seeds that they plant. They either buy the specific seed that they want from professional seedsmen each year, or they grow the seeds that they happen to have, and are happy to be surprised with the season's results. Both schools of thought are perfectly valid approaches.

People who are interested in maintaining true varieties do so because they specifically enjoy that part of the growing process. Others find hand pollinating to be deadly tedious, and just too much work. Anyone who has never tried their hand at hand pollinating really should give a it go. A single, hand pollinated hard shell gourd (which has gone on to fully develop and mature), can yield 200-400 pure true-to-type seeds. For the average grower, one high quality hand pollinated gourd can yield several years worth of seed, if properly cared for.

## **Open the Gourd**

Interestingly, the first step to saving gourd seed is the one that most people get wrong. Nearly everyone instinctively leaves the gourds to dry before cutting them open. This will not yield the highest quality results. It will however, work, and work quite well. It is not the end of the world to allow the gourds to dry completely, and only then open them up for the seed. High germination rates and good results can be had, and are had regularly. That said, it is best to open the gourd as soon as possible after the season is over. It is only necessary to wait long enough to feel satisfied that the gourd is mature, and will, if allowed to dry fully, be a prime example of the variety.

The season is over when the gourd plant is completely dead, and the vines and stem connected to the chosen gourd are fully brown and clearly no longer providing nourishment to the gourd. Remove the gourd from the plant, and with a hand saw or jigsaw, cut a hole in the gourd which is large enough to extract the seeds from inside. This step will be a wet yucky mess. A good deal of innards and guts may have to be extracted to get at all the gourd seeds. Suck it up and glop it out.

## **Cleaning Out the Guts**

Next, remove as much of the pulp from the seeds as possible. Try to pull out all of the gourd seed with as little pulp as possible. Don't be a perfectionist about it, as this is just an intermediate step. Just do the job as well as reasonably possible.

## **Spread Out the Seed**

The seeds should be well spread out, on racks or trays. The objective is to dry the gourd seed as quickly and uniformly as possible. The drying seeds should get as much air circulation as possible. Ideally, the racks or trays should have a ventilated or mesh bottom. This will aid the circulation of air, which is so important to the drying process.

## **Cleaning the Seed**

As the seed dries, the bits of pulp and innards that were not removed initially will also dry. At this point, these recalcitrant pieces are easy targets. The larger pieces can be picked out, and the very small bits are easily blown away, or can be sifted through the bottom if the rack allows for that. During the drying process, stir the seed around from time to time in order to be sure that everything is drying uniformly. Remove any seed that shows itself not to be in prime condition. If the seed is obviously immature, or quite light in color relative to the best seed, remove it.

# Storing the Seed

It will take several weeks to fully dry the seed. Do not rush this part of the process, as it is the most important step for proper preservation. When the seed appears to be fully dried, there are two storage options. The first option is to place the gourd seed in envelopes or brown paper bags, and then to store them in a dark location that is not subject to high levels of heat. Heat is an enemy to the storage life of seed. Tightly sealed plastic bags should be avoided when storing seed in this manner, because the container should be able to breathe and resist any chances of moisture and condensation. Seed stored in this manner will save quite well. A drop in germination rate of approximately 10% should be expected for each year that the gourd seed is saved.

The second storage option is refrigeration. This addresses the temperature consideration for preservation, as well as the final enemy of gourd seed preservation, air. Because condensation, fueled by moisture and heat, is not a threat, the seed can be (and should be) safely stored in plastic bags or containers. The seed can be refrigerated or frozen. This is the ideal storage solution, because the lack of heat, moisture, and air causes the deterioration process to virtually stop. Seeds can be stored for several years in this manner with a minimum drop in germination rates. Much as freezing virtually halts the deterioration or decay of food, gourd seed is perfectly preserved. Mark the containers well with the pertinent information regarding variety and year of harvest.

The text of this tutorial is owned by Turtle Feathers.