

# Tutorial: Cleaning Gourds with Potting Soil

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*Here are the dirty gourds that will be placed in these buckets of potting soil*

So you found the perfect gourd for that special project. Have you put off starting it because that gourd just doesn't want to come clean? Here's a great method for cleaning a lot of gourds in a short amount of time – even those with that impossible to remove layer of white skin. This works equally well for large gourds and small ornamentals.

## *Materials:*

Inexpensive Potting Soil Mix  
Plastic Buckets or Tubs  
Water  
Heavy Duty Scrub Sponges (Green)  
Copper Scouring Pads (or Heavy Gauge Stainless)  
Stiff Brush  
Scraper  
Murphy's Oil Soap

## *Process:*

- Make a layer of damp potting soil in the bottom of a bucket or tub. Cover the bottom completely, deep enough to hold your gourds without them touching the sides or bottom.
- Put a layer of gourds on the potting soil. Make sure that they do not touch one another or the sides of the tub. There needs to be space all around them for you to add more potting soil.

- Add potting soil, making sure that you completely cover the gourds. The objective is for every part of the gourd surface to be in contact with the potting soil.



*Now the buckets are full of both dirty gourds and damp potting soil*

- Continue layering gourds and potting soil until you run out of gourds or fill the bucket. End with a layer of potting soil.
- Add a small amount of water to dampen the soil. For a 5-gallon bucket, I used about a quart of water. Add more potting soil to top if it settles and exposes gourds.



- Leave the gourds in the bucket for 2-5 days, depending on gourd size. For small gourds, 3 days is the maximum. See Diary (below) for observations on timing for specific gourds.
- Remove gourds from the potting soil, but save it to use for cleaning more gourds. Rinse gourds with a garden hose.
- Wipe clean with a green scrub sponge. If there are stubborn spots, use a copper scouring pad. For warty gourds and stems, use a stiff brush to get into all those nooks and crannies. If needed, use some Murphy's Oil soap and a scraper.
- Rinse well to remove any debris.
- Allow to air dry.

*Diary:*

**Day 1** – “Planted” my gourds in the potting soil and wet them.

**Day 2** – I rinsed an ornamental gourd with the garden hose and it wiped clean with a green scrub sponge.



*Ornamental and small gourds wiped clean with a hose and sponge on Day 2*

**Day 3** – This is working well on Kentucky-grown gourds. Be aware that if your gourd has any blemishes or soft spot, this method usually destroys the gourd.

- NOTE: Gourds from Arizona and California often have a heavy white mold which is “baked on.” Most cleaning methods for these gourds is time consuming. This potting soil method has made a HUGE difference in removing the baked-on skin.
- The banana gourds just required wiping off after using the garden hose.
- The larger gourds still required some scraping and scrubbing, but not to the degree it takes when you use the 20-minute soak

and scrub method. I have actually had to take a knife and an electric sander to clean white-mold covered gourds in the past.

**Day 4** – Could not see any difference between Day 3 and Day 4.

**Day 5** – When the Kentucky-grown gourds have soaked for 5 days, they have an odor and it takes an additional 1-2 days to dry after cleaning.

**Day 6 & 7** – I do not recommend leaving gourds in the potting soil this long. They get quite wet and take 1-2 days longer to dry and have a major odor.

*Notes:*

- After burying and digging up the gourds in two tubs and two buckets, it took less than an hour to clean all of them. This is much faster than the soak and scrub method I previously used.



*Day 5 - Large Apple gourd is ready to clean with a scrub sponge. The skin is loose and will wipe right off*



*This shows the cleaned gourds using this method. Please note, however, that 2 thin-shelled gourds did not survive the potting soil cleaning method.*