



Patio Container Garden Fun *Betty Finch*

Attention condo and city dwellers! If you have space in a sunny location for a container (5 gallon minimum), consider planting a gourd vine this spring. A simple but effective patio garden can be created simply by sticking a wire trellis in half an oak wine barrel. Or create a more interesting garden by planting in an antique wringer washing machine, claw-footed bath tub, or other unique container. Weave a trellis using discarded tree trimmings, or train your vine to climb up a wall, along a fence, or over a gazebo. You are limited only by your imagination and or your condo association rules. A fast-growing gourd vine, it can shade your patio from the hot summer sun, be a pleasant conversation piece, and provide you with gourds for art projects.

A few tips

For drainage start with a layer of gravel, rock, or broken bits of clay pots on the bottom your container, then add whatever soil you have available. Including compost or organic material is recommended. Gourds like to be kept damp but will not tolerate their roots standing in water so your container must have a drain hole.

Keep your garden attractive, pick off any leaves that turn yellow before they dry up and turn brown. Cover the soil with river rock, moss, straw, bark or other material to dress it up, retain moisture, and reduce weeds.

Plant only one gourd per pot. A 5 gallon pot must be restricted to the smallest gourd varieties; Jewelry, Miniature Nigerian Bottle and Liliputz type gourds. You can expect about 3 to 5 mature gourds if you plant early and keep your vine watered. These same varieties could produce 20 gourds if planted in a half wine barrel sized container. The smaller the pot, the fewer the gourds. The larger the gourd variety, the fewer mature gourds a vine can produce.

A half of an oak wine barrel sized container can easily support a small bottle gourd and produce 3 - 5 usable gourds. Dipper gourds can be successfully grown in a large container if you restrict the vine to 2 gourds. Do this by picking off all the female flowers after 2 baby gourds have set. All baby gourds appear fuzzy, but a gourd

that has been pollinated and set will have shiny skin where one that has not set will take on a dull appearance about 3 days after blooming. All unpollinated gourds will eventually dry up or fall off where a pollinated gourd will increase in size very quickly and remain shiny. Make absolutely sure you have 2 healthy set gourds before picking off the excess female flowers. Picking off the other female blossoms will allow the plant to put more energy into developing your 2 keepers. If there are no night-flying insects (moths) in your area you will need to hand-pollinate. It is easy, in the evening as the new flowers open pick a male flower (powdery pollen center with no baby gourd beneath the flower) remove the petals, being careful not to knock the pollen off. Tap the pollen onto the sticky yellow center of a female flower, be gentle, don't bruise the female.

Your gourd vine will need something to climb on, they can climb walls and grow across roofs but be careful about letting your vine climb trees. Gourds can be difficult to harvest from the top of a tall tree and some trees will not tolerate being shaded by vines.

Manipulating gourds

Now for the really fun part. Experiment with manipulating your young gourds as they grow. Be innovative, think outside the box. Try a new twist on an old idea, change the shape of the gourd with bindings, grow a gourd inserted in a ring, flattened between boards, or in a mold.

Many state chapters of the American Gourd Society have competition categories for manipulated uncrafted gourds. The category is often named after Jim Story, a beloved AGS member from Indiana who was internationally known for his hand-trained gourds and generous habits of sharing his manipulation methods with others. The first place winners of the state competitions qualify to compete in the American Gourd Society national Jim Story Award. In addition to a large cash prize the AGS Jim Story Award winner will be featured in "The Gourd" Magazine. It could be you!

Each year more states are adding a Jim Story category, California recently added a manipulated gourd category with a \$50 cash prize. If your



A banana-type gourd growing in a 5-gallon pot. Red pipe cleaners were used as a simple way to bind the gourd, into a human form with a head, neck, and waistline. A smaller variety should have been used. These gourds will be thin and would have produced better in a larger container such as half a wine barrel.

state does not have a manipulated gourd category, suggest they add one. In the meantime you can enter in any state competition, you are not limited to the state your gourd was grown in.

An apartment dweller with one potted gourd plant to look after has advantages over the typical country gourd grower. It is not likely your patio plant will be bothered by gophers, moles, rabbits, and numerous other pests. You don't have far to walk to photograph your progress, check on your vine, or adjust the bindings on an in-progress manipulated gourd, and your attention will not be divided between many plants.

I challenge every gourd enthusiast to make an honest attempt to grow one manipulated gourd this season. The time is now to gather your materials. Obtain seeds for the gourd variety you want to grow, find a large planting container, fill it with soil, make a unique trellis, and brainstorm creative new manipulation ideas. Do something different and get in on the fun!

Application forms, tutorials, and details for entering the Jim Story Competition can be found on the American Gourd Society website www.americangourdsociety.org click on Jim Story Award.