

# Gourd Seed Germination -



## Gourd Seed Viability Test

*Lagenaria siceraria* or hardshell gourds require a long growing season, 100 to 180 days. The ground temperature should be at least sixty-five degrees and no frost on the horizon before seedlings are planted. If you start the seeds indoors while the weather is not yet conducive to starting the seeds directly in your garden you can get a 4 to 6 week jump on the season. This head start begins with the germination of your seeds **prior** to placing them in a seed starting mix! Why germinate the seeds *before* placing them in the seed starting mix? To know if they are viable. You will know within three to five days if your seeds are viable. You can start more of any variety that does not germinate as many future plants as you want to grow.

Germinating and starting seeds in a hothouse or inside your house is labor intensive so ask yourself if your growing season from your last frost date in the spring to the first frost date in the winter is long enough to plant directly in the ground. Small gourds require three to four months to mature but the large bushels and martins might need six months. Regardless of the gourds being planted, a 35-42 day head start is a big help to ensuring that your gourds will be mature by the end of the growing season.

**Methods for Germinating Seeds.** Some growers soak the seeds in a small cup of water before attempting to germinate them, some nick their shoulders or rub the edges of large gourd seeds with sandpaper, and then there are some who will place the seeds on damp paper towels in a warm environment.

One theory is moisture will penetrate the seed to encourage germination. The “AGS Growers Group” was challenged to compare these three methods of germination in the Spring of 2013.

**My Results.** There was no difference in the percentage or speed of seed germination regardless of the method of preparation. For me this is good news because I like the simplest method that works the best.

This is what I do to germinate my seeds in the house:

- Place seeds in wet paper towels on a cookie sheet. If I am starting several varieties I put them on different paper towels, each with a wooden stick that has the variety name for that towel.
- Place them in a regular oven with the light on and door closed. Use an oven thermometer to monitor the temperature. The goal is to keep the temperature between 80 and 90° F.
- A viable seed will germinate in three to five days. Yes, it’s okay to take them out when you need to use the oven for baking.
- Check daily and add water as necessary to keep the paper towels moist.
- When germination is complete, carefully place the seed in a peat pot with warm, moist soilless seedling mix and put back in the oven with the door closed.
- Using the oven thermometer I keep track of the temp. If the temperature goes over ninety I open the door a crack. Be sure to close the door before it goes below 80°.
- When the first set of leaves appear I move the pots from the oven to a table with a plastic tray over a grower’s heat mat, and overhead fluorescent shop lights.
- I keep the lights three inches above the plants as they grow, for 14-16 hours per day.

**Timing.** Start this germinating process no more than four to six weeks before the last expected frost date for your zone. If you start too early you will have rambunctious plants taking over your indoor space. The objective is strong, healthy plants to set into the garden with a head start on the growing season.

I never tire of the process of planting various gourd seeds and nurturing the plants to maturity. Gourds

# Experimentation

Contributed by Cecile Garrison

are enchanting at all stages of growth, and while insects and diseases that plague them are predictable and challenging I always look forward to the harvest.

## Materials

Paper towels

Mister/squirt bottle

Cookie sheet

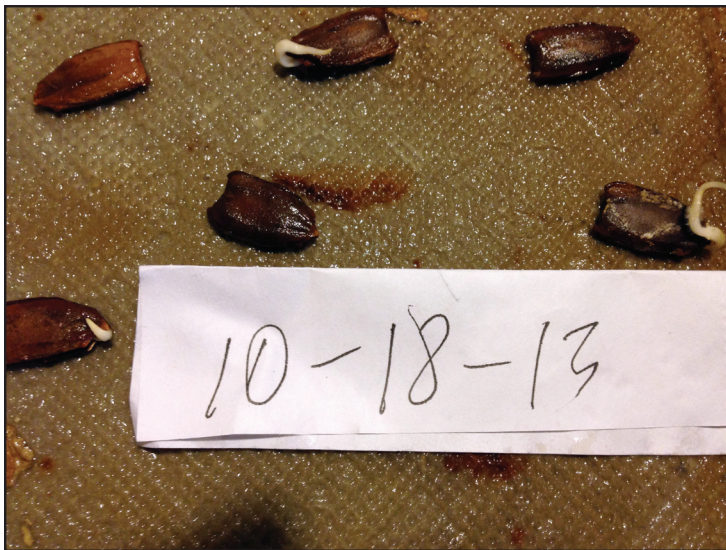
Peat pots (not too small)

Soiless seed starting mix (Miracle Grow, Pro Mix Kp)

Heat mats

Grow lights

Plastic trays and covers



*Five Days In Oven*

## Do's & Don'ts

### Germination

- Label the seeds on each paper towel
- Watch the temp & keep between 80° and 90°
- Keep seeds and paper towels moist, but not laying in water
- When sprout has tiny hairs it is time to plant it

### Potting

- Moisten (not soggy) the seed starting mix with warm water before filling (peat) pots
- Press seed starting mix in pot and fill up to within ½" of top
- Poke a slanted hole in the pot with your finger between 2-3 inches in depth (half the total height of the pot)

- Carefully place the sprouted seed in with seed down and sprout up about ½" from the top
- Loosen the mix at the top of the pot and fill the hole. Gently compact it.
- Keep pots warm and moist
- Seedling should appear above the soil in about 2 days

*Do Not pull out a seedling* from a pot (if two or more were in the same pot) because it will damage the roots of the other seedling. Snip it with scissors instead.

*Do Not pull seed cover off* leaves if the leaves are partially stuck in the seed because it will damage the leaves. If the second set of leaves also gets stuck then snip the tip off those original leaves and free them from their cover, thereby freeing the true leaves as well.



*Grown Indoors*

The photos for this article were lost in cyber space and I volunteered to starts some seeds just for the photos (in October)...but I couldn't toss out the babies so I planted them in pots and this is what they looked like in December!