

Elementary Class or GOURDING 101

By Sue Kostka

Cleaning the Outside

The outside of the gourd forms mold while drying. Most times it is black, but occasionally there will also be a white waxy surface. To remove the mold, wrap the gourd in a towel and soak it in warm water for several minutes. Using a copper chore boy, (and some elbow grease) scrub away. If the gourd has the white waxy surface that doesn't seem to want to come off, I've found that using a product by Dawn called "Power Dissolver" (look for it near the dish soap in the grocery store) works well. Once you have completely cleaned your gourd, set it aside and let it dry. I usually wait at least overnight.

It is now time to decide what your gourd will become!!! Will it be a bowl, a vase, or a freeform piece of art? This will dictate how you will cut it open. (Of course, you are not required to do this step if you plan to leave the gourd whole, but we will assume from here on that you opened your gourd.) When you have decided the angle you want, you will draw a cut line. At this time you need to perforate your gourd on the line with a xacto knife blade. The hole should be large enough to insert your sawblade. Cut around the line and remove the top to reveal the insides.

Cleaning the Inside

Now is the time that the inside will need to be cleaned. Your gourd is full of seeds and pulp that must be removed; and, sometimes it will have a sponge-like coating. (ugh!) After you have removed the seeds and pulp, you will need to clean the sidewalls. There are many tools that can aid in doing this. I have used things such as an old ice cream spoon, melon baller, seashell, canning jar lids, etc. You can also obtain gourd cleaning supplies, such as, scrapers or ball cleaners (that are used in a drill). Whatever you do, a mask is always recommended.

The dirty work is over and now the FUN begins!

Transferring Images onto Gourds

There are different ways to get your image onto a gourd. You can draw it freehand, use graphite paper, copy it to Stick & Burn, or trace it onto Glad Press & Seal.

Graphite

Graphite is a product used to transfer a pattern by placing it under the image and then tracing. You can also make your own graphite using a soft leaded pencil on the back of your pattern and then tracing the image onto the gourd surface. (Note: My suggestion is to transfer your image onto tracing paper. It is more pliable than copy paper when taped on the gourd surface)

Stick & Burn

This is a product sold by Welburn Gourd Farms that can be run through your laser copier and then it's peeled from its backing and applied to the gourd surface. Then you burn through the stick and burn and remove the residual paper when done. (they have preprinted patterns, also).

Glad Press & Seal

This product (found in grocery stores) is similar to the above. However, you will need to place the press and seal over your pattern and then trace it using a Sharpie marker. Apply the Press & Seal to the gourd surface and then burn through it.*

*This could be toxic, so wearing a mask is recommended.

Placement of Pattern

The center of the pattern should be placed just at or above center of the gourd. Tape down with scotch tape or painter's tape (preferred) and begin carefully tracing the pattern. I use a colored pencil (red) so it is evident when the pattern is completely transferred. Remove your pattern and graphite. Voila! Your image is now on the gourd, and you're ready to wood burn.

PYROGRAPHY (Woodburning)

“Pyrography” means the art of producing designs or images on wood/leather by burning with a hot instrument. We gourders use the term “wood burning”. To wood burn our images to a gourd (which is a lot like wood).

Woodburners

The best type of wood burner is one where you can control the heat. Craft burners are OK, and I understand they now have heat controls and about 4 different tips on some brands. Do some research to see which best fits you.

Tips

There are many tips to choose from. The most common would be a skew, a shader, and a writer tip. A ball tip is also a nice addition for small details.

Temperature

Always start with a low heat setting until you determine the right temperature for your gourd. Practice on a piece of shard until you have determined a consistent char (color) flow. . Do not apply a lot of pressure with the tip to get a darker color; i.e., your tips could bend or break. If it’s too light, turn the burner up, a little at a time, until you have reached a good char.

Begin your project by outlining the image you transferred to your gourd. Again, do not use a lot of pressure. Use your tip as if you were sketching a picture. Nice and easy!

When you have gone over all of the lines. Erase all your graphite/pencil marks by using baby wipes or Clorox wipes. Begin shading.

Shading

Shading defines light and dark areas or from the light source that give depth to your image. Begin shading by doing small circular motion strokes to achieve the darker value(s). There is no need to turn up the burner; the more times you go over an area, the darker it will naturally become. If you are unsure where to shade, use a pencil and shade your pattern prior to burning. This will give you a reference to look at. Continue all over the pattern area, leaving some uncharred areas.