

INTRODUCTION TO GOURDS – Beginner’s Workshop
Instructor Bill Tarlton

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN:

- Picking the right gourd for your project
- Basic tools/supplies of the trade (show and tell)
- Available resources
- Cleaning the gourd
- Selection and application of the design
- Using tools and supplies (practical application)

PICKING THE RIGHT GOURD:

Your best results will come from proper planning and execution of your project. Some artists can look at a gourd and visualize the final outcome. The shape may suggest a figurine, a bowl, a vase, or sculptured piece. If you’re not as adept, there are other ways to come up with ideas for your projects. Go to the Internet and type “Gourd Art” in the search engine. You’ll be amazed at the number of sites and artists who share their work on the Internet. Example: mine is tumbleweedartstudio.com. If you don’t have Internet, go to the library and research gourd art in their books or on their computers. Walk through some galleries and focus on the art that would complement those particular projects you have in mind or would like to try. Gourds come in many shapes and sizes. There are bottle gourds, canteen gourds, kettle gourds, snake gourds, banana gourds, apple gourds, warty gourds, and the list goes on. I’ve attached a sheet to help you identify types of gourds.

Your project will determine the type of gourd you will use. Kettle and bushel gourds are great for bowls; bottle gourds can be turned into beautiful vases; snake and banana gourds are the basis for figurines; and cannonball gourds are perfect for heads on a figurine.

We will be using a kettle gourd for our project today.

BASIC TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

- Stainless Steel Pot Scrubber
- Saws/Cutters, Files, Exacto Knife
- Scrapers/Cleaning Balls/Sandpaper
- Belt and Disc Sanders
- Respiratory Mask
- Drawing/Painting and Transfer Paper
- Inks, Leather Dyes, and Paints
- Burners and burning pens
- Dremmel, burrs and carving tools
- Dividers/Compass
- Painters Tape
- Heat (Embossing) Tool
- Polyurethane/Varnish/Acrylic Spray (Matte, Satin, Gloss)
- Gourd Wax

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AVAILABLE RESOURCES:

- Harbor Freight for Tools
- Welburn Farm <http://www.welburngourdfarm.com/toolsandsupplies.aspx> (tools/supplies)
- Idaho Gourd Society <http://idahogourdsociety.org/> (information)
- Other State Gourd Society Chapters (information)
- The Caning Shop <http://www.caning.com/> (tools/supplies)
- Hobby Lobby (supplies)
- Michaels (supplies)
- Everglades Woodcarving Supplies (burners)
- Ram Products, Inc. <https://www.ramprodinc.com/hobby-products/> (Carvers and burs)

CLEANING THE GOURD:

First and foremost, unless you purchase pre-cleaned gourds, you will need **stainless steel pot scrubber** and possibly a **scraper/knife** and a lot of elbow grease to clean the gourd. I’ve tried a number of techniques that were suggested by others but I find myself returning to the stainless steel wool.

If your project is going to result in a bowl, you’ll need to cut the gourd open at the top. Gourds shells are both hard and at times fragile. The best method I’ve found to cut open a gourd is to use a **powered hand saw**. In most cases the thickness of the gourd will determine what type of saw you will need. As with anything else, preference and price will most likely play a part in what you buy. Microlux, Proxxon, and Black and Decker are options to choose from.

Caution: Anytime you cut a gourd open be sure you wear **respiratory protection**. The gourd curing process (going from a soft green skin to a hard shell) subjects the gourd to all types of weather conditions and results in the formation of mold on the inside and to some degree on the outside of the gourd. You do not want to inhale any of the dust from the sawing process. The inside is also a fibrous material even though it looks like sawdust. I always recommend that you always do cutting and cleaning outdoors.

Once the opening has been cut you’ll see a variety of dried pulp and seeds that need to be removed. One suggestion I would highly recommend is that, in a sprayer, you mix bleach (1 Tbsp.) and water to spray into the gourd. Bleach will kill/neutralize the mold and the water will keep the dust down. Again, there are a number of tools you can use to remove that material. The cheapest tool is an old **tablespoon** which you can use to scrape the sides. A number of specialized tools are available from **long handled scrapers to cleaning balls** that attach to a drill. It’s a matter of choice and the desired outcome. You may also use **sandpaper** in the final smoothing process. Many gourd artists keep the seeds for growing their own gourds or for use as an embellishment.

Now that the gourd is cut and cleaned you are ready to put your design on the surface. As a beginner you most likely don’t have a wide selection of tools to choose from. If you are a natural artist you can draw your design directly on the gourd with a **pencil**. If you don’t have that natural ability you can simply transfer your design to the gourd using **carbon paper**. One technique is to pick your design, scan

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it into the computer, and resize it to fit your gourd, print it out and transfer it to the gourd. Once you're satisfied with the image you can decide how you want to make it permanent. Here are the options: use a **Sharpie** with indelible ink to make the outline; use a **wood burner** to define the lines; or use a **Dremmel** tool equipped with the appropriate **burr** to carve the image. Erase your carbon or pencil lines using a soft eraser or a baby wipe.

You may want to use color on/in your image. Before you take that step, you need to decide if you want to leave the gourd natural or do you want to give it a special appearance. Do you want the piece to take on a mahogany appearance or a walnut appearance? Should the piece be a bright Berry Red or would Turquoise look better? What about two-tone? Once you've decided you need to select your medium. One of the easiest and most effective ways of coloring your gourd is to use **inks or leather dyes**. These products apply easily, can be dried quickly, and give your piece a beautiful finish. Inks can be water based or alcohol based. Each presents a different appearance when applied. You can use **acrylic paints** to make the image come to life. As you gain confidence in your abilities and develop your own style, inlays, textures, fabrics and other more complex embellishments may be your choice.

I've demonstrated the cleaning technique; the use of the saw; and how to clean the inside of the gourd.

Your Task

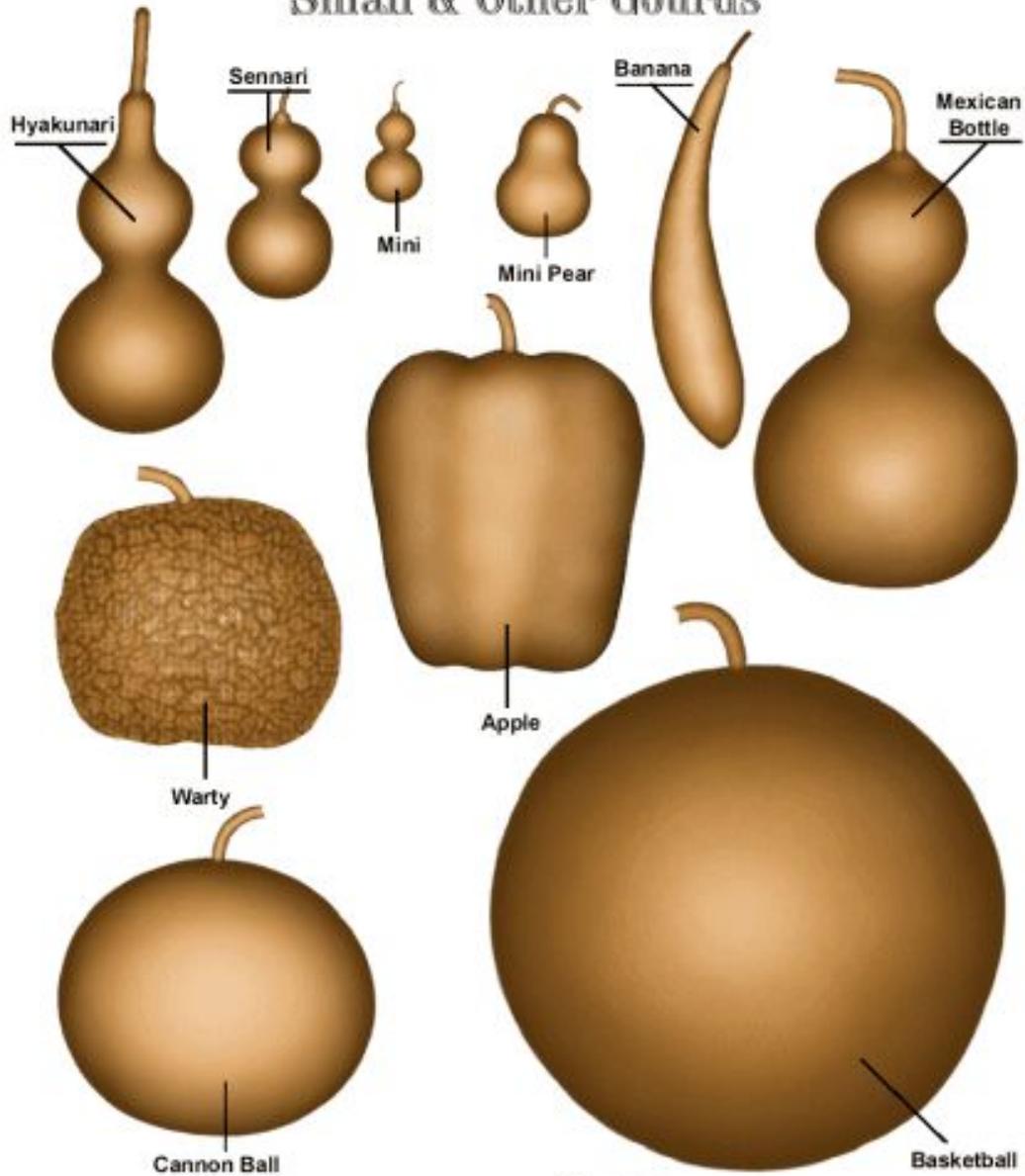
- Pick a stencil or draw your own design on the gourd
- Burn the design using the burner
- Pick your primary gourd color (ink)
- Dry the ink/Paint your design
- Sign your project
- Spray with Varnish or Polyurethane

Gourd Identification Chart

Kettle / Bottle Gourds



Gourd Identification Chart Small & Other Gourds



Gourd Identification Chart

Long Gourds

