



Gourds Galore!

By Donna Fossum, SAWS Conservation

Fall is here and so is gourd season. Most of the stores in town have a wide selection of them, but the most popular gourd this time of year is the pumpkin. We decorated them for Halloween and now we'll eat them as pumpkin pie.

Gourds are grown for both ornamental and utility purposes. Most of us have seen gourds when they are dried and made into arts and crafts objects such as bird houses. Purple martins love to make dried gourds their homes as they migrate through our area. Many gourds are prized for their interesting shapes and that is what endears most of us to the lowly gourd.

Gourds are annuals that thrive in areas where the temperature is 70 to 85 degrees. Their vines, which are closely related to cucumbers, squash and melons, grow best on trellises. Gourds are fairly easy to cultivate, but they do require good fertile soil. While the gourd is growing, you can create shapes by tying soft string or bands around young fruit or by frequently and gently bending the fruit into the shape you desire. Just be careful not to scratch the fruit.

When the gourds are ready to be harvested, make sure to leave some of the stem and use sharp shears to make clean cuts. After cutting the gourd, wash thoroughly and place it in a dry place out of direct sunlight and with good air circulation. Leave until dry and hardened. The gourds can then be decorated. The growing, harvesting, drying and decorating of gourds is a fun family project and a great way to get the little ones involved in gardening. But beware: Gourd growing can become addictive.