

Proper Care Of Pumpkins And Gourds Means Use Beyond Halloween Decor

You can extend the life of pumpkins and gourds by proper selection methods and care. In general, most pumpkins and gourds are harvested and available in stores by mid-September. However, harvest depends on local conditions and markets. Pumpkins and gourds shouldn't be harvested until they are mature and have developed a hard shell. They also should be out of the field before freezing temperatures set in or fall rains begin.

Pumpkins and gourds will rot if harvested too soon or too late. If picked before the shell hardens, puncture wounds are likely to begin rotting. If pumpkins and gourds must be left in the field longer than desired, hay can be placed under them to prevent contact with damp soil which can induce rot.

When ready to harvest, cut pumpkins and gourds from the vine and leave a good portion of stem for a handle. When selecting pumpkins and gourds from a seller, it is a good idea to choose those that have not been piled high or mishandled because bruised areas are likely to rot.

Transport pumpkins and gourds with care as well. If transporting in a vehicle, be sure to surround them with soft material and transport them so that the pumpkins or gourds won't roll around or be damaged.

Pumpkins and gourds can be washed with a dilute bleach solution to prevent the growth of mildew and stored in a warm, dry place until Halloween or even later. Avoid carving pumpkins for as long as possible to minimize rotting. Gourds will last an especially long time if dried thoroughly and kept in an area with good air circulation.

While pumpkins are most commonly used for jack-o-lanterns, there are a number of other uses. Magazines are a good place to find creative ideas. To create an exciting display, display more than one pumpkin and choose different sizes or colors. Pumpkins now are available in blue, white and various shades of orange. Special types of pumpkins, pie pumpkins, also are available for cooking purposes. These pumpkins are sweeter and less fibrous than the usual jack-o-lantern types.

Gourds can be stored and used later in the year for various crafts. A number of resources are available in libraries or on the Internet with creative ideas such as decorating gourds using a wood burner or painting gourds for Christmas tree decorations.

Pumpkin and gourd seeds can be saved to plant the following spring. Seeds should be soaked for 24 hours to loosen the adhering pulp, cleaned well and then allowed to dry. Seeds can be stored in a clean, air-tight container in a cool, dry place. This is a fun project for kids because seeds will not always produce an identical pumpkin or gourd. Pumpkin, melon and squash seeds are a great way to attract cardinals and other birds plus squirrels to feeders during the winter months.