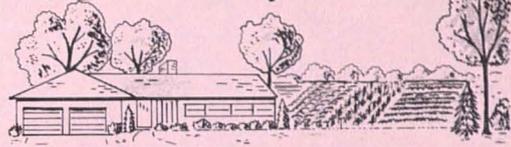


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Department of Information
and Agricultural Journalism
Institute of Agriculture
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

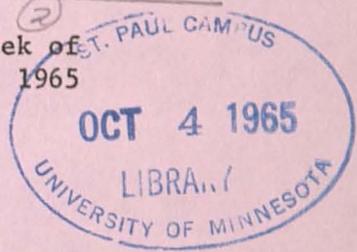
Yard 'n' Garden



C. GUSTAV HARD ORRIN C. TURNQUIST
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA ST. PAUL, MINN. 55101

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GOURDS

Gourds have become increasingly popular for fall table decorations. The variety of shapes and colors make them interesting in arrangements.

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The gourd is a botanical variety of the pumpkin. After a light frost gourds should be cut off the vine with a sharp knife or pruning shears, leaving the stem attached to the fruit.

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There are several ways to tell if the fruits are mature. Often the fingernail is used to determine the hardness of the skin. The disadvantage of this test is that if the fruits are underripe a blemish is left which destroys the ornamental value of the fruit. A better test is the browning and drying of the stem.

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Often the skin of the fruits is etched or blemished by soil insects. You can prevent such blemishes by placing a small board or piece of plastic or glass under the developing gourds. Frequent rotating of the fruits will result in more uniform color.

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After harvesting the gourds, wash them with soapy water and rinse in clean water to which you have added a household disinfectant. The disinfectant will help control the organisms on the shell which often cause decay.

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Next spread the gourds on several layers of newspaper in a warm, dry place to evaporate the moisture, harden the skin and set the color. During this process, which takes about a week, rotate the fruits frequently so they will dry evenly. Then wipe the gourds and place them in a warm, dry but dark room for three to four more weeks to cure.

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After the gourds are cured, some people like to give the fruits a coat of wax, shellac or varnish. A water-base wax is a fast, inexpensive treatment that produces a slight gloss and enhances the natural color.

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