

How to Create a Coffee-Dyed Etching on a Green Gourd

By Betty Finch

You can begin etching a design in the skin of a growing gourd, while it is still on the vine...weeks before you pick it. Live etchings can produce excellent results; however, the lines can form thick scabs that will increase the width of the lines. Very fine lines must be etched after the gourd has been harvested.

There is an art form that is referred to as the Hawaiian Ni ihau Ipu. It involves etching on a freshly picked green mature gourd whose stem has turned brown. The surface of the skin should still be green and the gourd heavy, indicating there is still a lot of moisture inside.

Let the newly harvested gourd sit a day or two before etching. During this time, sketch your pattern on the skin using a water-based, fine-tip felt pen, taking care not to press hard enough to indent the skin. You can erase the pen marks to modify your design using a lightly damp paper towel. Note, the skin must be totally dry for a felt tip to work as you revise your sketch.

Design Info

- Where you etch, or remove skins will remain light colored
- Where the gourd skin is intact, the healthy skin, is where it will turn dark
- Dye: Coffee (any) Strong, brewed liquid coffee
- Dye is wicked to the healthy skin, whereas the gourd seals/protects the scraped areas and thereby prevents/plugs the entrance of dye to those areas. So, your etching may be like a negative.

Process

- Gently scrape or lift the skin from any areas of your design that you want to be a light color. A pocket knife works great as a scraper, but be careful to NOT penetrate the shell.
- Let the gourd sit until all the scraped areas appear to have dried, this may take a few days.
- Cut the gourd open and pour strong liquid coffee into the gourd, filling it to the top.
- If the interior of the gourd is solid, simply scoop a depression in the middle to pour in the first amount of coffee to fill it up.
- As the coffee is absorbed, top it off daily to keep the gourd full.
- WARNING! The gourd will stink at this point so you will want to keep it outside, but not in direct sunlight.
- This part of the process may take 30 days or more.
- When all of the skin on the gourd has turned moldy and died, the gourd is ready to clean.
- Dump the stinky interior gunk and seeds out.
- Scrub off the rotten skin with a pot scrubber and you will be able to see your results.
- When the gourd is dry, a thin layer of olive oil can be wiped on for a luster that enhances the pattern.