

Photographing Your Gourd for the Jim Story Award

by Betty Finch

Winter or early Spring is the time to think about what variety of gourd to grow and how you might creatively manipulate the growth. Use your imagination; try experimenting with a crazy new idea. This can be exciting and fun.

To be eligible to enter the National Jim Story Award competition, you must first win a state-level manipulated gourd competition. If your state does not have a manipulated gourd category, express your interest and ask that they add one. You can also enter your gourd in any state that has a Jim Story or manipulated gourd category. Details for entering the Jim Story Award competition can be found on the AGS Website.

More and more art competitions are being judged from digital photographs. In fact, some AGS competitions are judged by photographs. Many non-gourd art competitions are also making it possible for artists to upload their images to a website. If you don't have a good digital camera, it's probably time you bought one or found a friend who can help photograph your artwork and show you how to send the digital files through a computer.

The National Jim Story Award has gone digital. Entering this prestigious national competition is quick and easy for the average computer user, but don't worry if you aren't into the computer age. Entries submitted the old fashioned way (on paper, by the US mail, using printed photographs) will still be accepted. The submission deadline is November 30th.

Jim Story believed in sharing information to help others learn, you can continue his sharing philosophy by taking pictures showing how you manipulated your gourd. How-to photos encourage and educate others, and assist the judges. In the Jim Story spirit of helping others, here are some tips for photographing the gourds you will entering, whether they be photographed while growing in your garden or your dried manipulated gourds.

1. Know Your Camera

- Check your camera settings
- When in doubt, leave the camera on auto, but even the simplest point-and-shoot cameras will have settings that can improve your photographs. For example, set your camera on close up or portrait rather than panorama.
- You may want to turn the flash off if the reflection creates a white glare that washes out the gourd.
- If you aren't sure what to do just experiment, take several photos changing the settings each time and keep notes of which worked best.



2. Have the Gourd in Focus

- To make sure you don't shake the camera use a tripod.
- Set your camera to take the photo automatically on a delay.
- After taking a picture look at it on the camera display, zoom in to make sure the edges of the gourd are not blurry. Immediately delete blurry photos to prevent them from accidentally being used.

3. Use the Highest Resolution Your Camera or Camera Phone is Capable Of

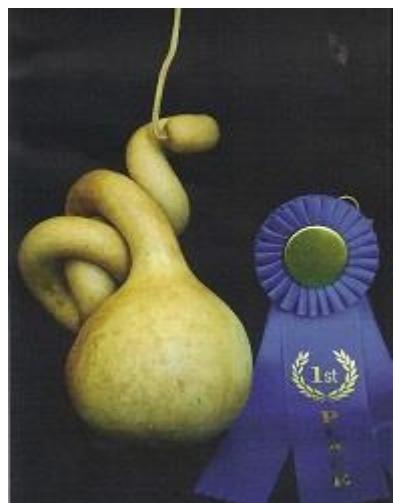
- Check the settings on your camera (camera phone). Choose the highest resolution available. Higher resolution photos take up more memory.
- If your camera has a choice, set it on the highest resolution, it can always be reduced later if needed but resolution cannot be increased later.
- If you use low resolution when you take the picture, the judges will not be able to zoom in to see detail because the picture will turn into blurry little squares.
- An easy way to check to see if your resolution is high enough is to look at the picture on the camera display and hit the zoom button two or three times to examine the picture close-up. If the picture turns blurry the resolution is too low or the picture is out of focus.
- Keep in mind these photos and the other required information you submit may be published in "The Gourd Magazine" and used on the AGS website. For offset printing the magazine needs a minimum of 300 pixels per inch.

4. Photographs of Your Gourd With The Winning Ribbon and the Entrant Holding the Gourd Are Required for the Jim Story Award Entry

- Place your first-place ribbon in the picture to one side of the gourd.
- Use a plain background. An easy way to create a plain background is to place a solid colored sheet or large piece of paper behind the gourd.
- A piece of paper or blank poster board on a chair provides a fast easy background for smaller gourds.
- Do not place the ribbon over any portion of the gourd. The judges want to see the whole gourd.

5. Use Bright Indirect or Diffused Light

- Make, buy or borrow a fabric-covered light box/cube with the lights on the outside of the box.
- Photograph outside in the shade or on an overcast day.
- Don't photograph in bright direct sunlight. Photos taken in bright sunlight will have dark shadows and faded out bright spots where there is glare make it difficult for the judges to see details.



6. Fill the Frame

- Zoom in so that the whole gourd is in the frame, but as big as possible. Get close enough to make the gourd almost touch the edges of the photo
- The judges need to see the gourd, not background.
- Don't put props in the picture. Don't clutter your pictures with rabbit fur, plastic flowers, or busy backgrounds. Judges only need to see the gourd.
- Don't leave large margins. Judges don't need to see sky, or background.

In Conclusion

With a digital camera entering the National Jim Story Award is fast and easy. Join the Jim Story movement. Grow a gourd of any variety; change the shape of a baby gourd with whatever means you can dream up.

Experiment with new ways to manipulate a growing gourd, carve a wooden mold, bind a baby gourd, tie a knot or think of innovative new ideas that have never been tried before. Just do it and enter your results in a state-level manipulated gourd category.

Challenge your friends to see who can come up with the most clever idea and have fun!

Do's	Don'ts
Do have the gourd in focus	Don't submit blurry pictures
Do use a high resolution camera setting	Don't use low resolution camera settings
Do use diffused or indirect light	Don't use bright lights
Do put the ribbon next to the gourd	Don't put props in the picture
Do zoom in and make the gourd fill the frame	Don't layer the ribbon over the gourd Don't leave large margins