

## Preparing the Garden Area

### Space

- Gourds need full sun, plenty of space and access to water in times of drought.
- Soaker hoses are recommended so water goes to plant root area, not leaves.
  - Gourds do well when the plants are 6 to 10 feet apart
  - If the gourds are too crowded, they will grow higher as they compete for light and the female flowers will tend to be hidden under this canopy, out of sight from pollinators.
  - It will also be more difficult to get into your patch to check for disease and insect damage and set the gourds upright for a more flat bottom.
- You might decide to trellis your gourds to conserve space. Trellised gourds have their own pluses and issues.
  - The longer varieties will have a better chance of growing straight as opposed to coiling on the ground.
  - You have a better chance of getting under the leaves when spraying and the gourds will tend to be cleaner and less bothered by things that crawl on the ground like slugs.
  - But trellised gourds are more susceptible to drought as they have fewer auxiliary roots growing from the vines to help collect water.
  - Working the soil between seasons may be more difficult with permanent trellises as well.

### Soil

- Like most desirable plants, gourds prefer a soil free of weeds and grasses. They can grow under difficult conditions, but competition for moisture and nutrients may cause them to be smaller and less in number. Prepare the soil as you would any other vegetable in your garden.
- It is optional, but very valuable to have the soil tested in the area where you plan to grow. Take samples from several places in the garden area and mix to get the results for average of the whole garden.
  - Agriculture/Extension offices tests soil inexpensively
- The optimal pH for gourds is 6.5
  - Some folks just skip soil testing and go right for the fertilizer hoping for the best, but if, for example, the soil pH is fairly high or low for gourds the nutrients that are there may be unavailable to the plant.
  - Understanding Soil pH and how to correct it– Blog (Burpee.com)  
<https://www.burpee.com/blog/article10668.html>
- Fertilizer: A liberal application of 10-10-10 should get your plants off to a good start. Fertilize again when the plants begin to run.
  - To learn more about fertilizers and the pros and cons of the two basic types, visit Wikipedia here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertilizer>

- Manure improves the quality of your soil structure and harbors beneficial soil organisms but it does not contain a lot of basic nutrients that are immediately available. Manure and compost are good for the gourd patch but can come with their own set of problems

### Watering Gourd Plants (in the Garden)

- **Soaker hoses** let you water the roots and not the leaves, which will mean you will use less water and reduce the risk of some diseases, such as powdery mildew.
  - Lay the soaker hoses when you are planting and mulching b/c doing so later will be difficult once the plants send out their runners and leaves.
  - Flag the end of each soaker hose that needs to be hooked up to your household hose, for no matter how obvious the location is at the beginning of the season, it will be obscured by thousands of leaves before long.
- **Aqua cones** allow you to add something like compost tea or water to each plant without having to use a large amount. 1-2 cones per plant are sufficient. You connect the pouring spout of soda bottles or quart milk jugs to the cones (bottoms of the bottles are cut off and are where you add your water or tea). This is great when the plants are small.
  - As the plants grow it is harder to get to and find the cones as the patch fills with foliage, so at some point the hoses are needed.
  - Once you can no longer add things like compost tea via the aqua cones you might be able to use a fertilizer siphon to siphon into your soaker hose lines.
- Avoid working in your garden when the leaves are wet.

### Layout

- Mark planting locations 6 to 10' apart with garden stakes.
- Place soaker hoses for later in the season watering needs.
- Spread mulch (3" depth is plenty) in the garden, except where plant holes will be dug.
- Place 6' squares of weed block fabric at each stake, and pin in place with garden staples or rocks.

### Mulching

- Do not place the mulch while the soil is cold. Mulched soil warms more slowly so it is best to wait until the soil is warmer.
  - Any time after the soil is warm, and stakes, hoses and plastic are in place you can mulch your entire patch
- There are a number of potential mulches, but none are problem-free.
  - Straw eventually yields rye grass growing in your patch
  - Chopped leaves drive the pH up.

- Three inches of mulch is enough. More is not better— it will cut down the infiltration of water and air into your soil.
- Keep mulch a few inches away from the plant stems to reduce the invasion of pests and disease.
- Have some sort of covers available for young plants in case of extreme weather (eg, strong winds, hail) while the plants are young. Peach baskets are ideal, but in a pinch, paper bags held down with rocks, will work.

## **Plant the Seedlings**

### **Timing**

- Plant gourds about the same time as other warm season vegetables.
- Young plants should have 6 leaves (or more), counting the cotyledons.
- In colder climates, starting plants indoors and transplanting when soil temperatures reach 65 degrees may be your best option.

### **Starter Solution (Optional)**

Once the weather, plants and patch are ready ...

- Soak your potted gourds thoroughly with a high phosphorous starter solution such as 2 TBS of 10-55-10 fertilizer dissolved in one gallon of water. Phosphorous is the middle number of the fertilizer N-P-K ratio. Submerge the entire pot till the bubbles stop and then let the pot drain.

### **Transplantation**

- Dig a hole slightly bigger than your pot and gently tap the gourd plant from its pot, set it in the hole, fill in with the surrounding soil and press down firmly all the way around it.
- Transplant shock is when there is a period of slow growth for a week after the plant is set in the ground. This is usually short-lived and less noticeable when the soil temp is above 60.
- Make sure the soil is not too wet. Working the soil when it is too wet will damage soil structure.
- Young plants need protection from cold nights, strong winds and pests. A “bonnet” made with Reemay (row cover fabric) works.
  - Some use the frame from old, large lampshades or wire hoops as the form to wrap a row cover over each plant. Stake it to the ground and cover the sides about ⅓ to ½ high