

## Grow Funny Plants

In this activity you will learn how to grow gourds or squashes.

### What do we need to start?

- A packet of mixed gourd seeds. You may be able to get young plants in a pot from the garden centre.
- Compost
- Pots

This activity is to grow gourds. These are in the same family as courgettes, marrow, or squash. If you want something to eat, then grow some of these instead. You can't eat gourds because although they are attractive and come in many different shapes, they are very bitter.



1. As we mentioned above, you may be able to buy plants in a pot from your local garden centre. This saves all the work of getting the seeds to germinate and grow. If you've bought plants, move on to step 2.

If you're growing from seeds, look at the growing instructions on the seed packet. This will probably tell you to start the seeds off in small pots, in compost, in the greenhouse. You could probably do this indoors on a windowsill or in a propagator. The seeds need to be kept moist and not too cold.

2. When the small plants are growing, they should be hardened-off before trying to plant outside. You do this over a period of a couple of weeks taking them outside into the cooler temperature for longer periods each day until they become used to it. These are tender plants and exposing them to frost should be avoided.

3. Whilst the plants have been growing and hardened-off, you need to prepare the area outside where they are to grow. You could also grow them in a grow-bag which you can get from the garden centre. Or you could prepare a bed in your garden where they are to be planted. This needs to be an area protected from strong winds with good soil and that is free of weeds. You could also add manure or plant food to this area to help the plants grow.



4. Plant out your small plants when you are ready and keep them well watered.

5. As the season progresses your plants should get bigger and bigger. After they flower, small fruits should form that will eventually grow into the gourd or squash. You should watch these grow.

Depending on the variety you've chosen, these vegetables can get very large indeed.

6. When they are fully ripe, you can cut squashes and other edible varieties and use them in the kitchen. You can harvest gourds before they are fully ripe. If you put them in a large bowl in the house, then they will continue to change colour from a greenish shade to yellow and then orange. Many gourds also have other attractive patterning, like knobby skin, or radial green stripes.