

JULY IN THE GOURD PATCH by Celia Shaneyfelt

July is an almost magical month in the gourd patch. A lot is happening to keep you returning several times a day to admire your vines' bounty. A special piece of magic we are enjoying this year is watching a mockingbird nest being built in the top of one of our arbors.

Your early plantings should already have beautiful gourds nearly full size and moving into the stage of thickening their shells. In these patches, the plants are still putting on blooms and creating more baby gourds. For the big drum and bushel varieties I have limited the plants to two gourds each to focus all the plant's energy on size and producing thick shells.

Later plantings may be showing tiny baby gourds, tantalizing you with the promise of what they will become. There is still time to ripen these gourds, even in the large varieties. July will be our last month to allow large gourd varieties (dippers, kettles, etc.) to develop new gourds. They need time to grow and thicken their shells.



Some of my latest plantings are only now beginning to send vines up the arbors. These are small varieties that will not need as long a period to grow and mature. These are second plantings. I am still hopeful that I can get a good harvest from them.



With all the rain we've had this year, the bugs are really bad. Keep a close lookout for squash bugs and their eggs. I carry a water bottle with some soapy water in the bottom to drop bugs and egg clusters into when I find them. They can cause a lot of damage to your vines, especially if you miss a batch of eggs and they hatch out and start munching. Another problem bug has been the cucumber beetles, both the spotted and the striped varieties. They seem ever present this year. We smash all we can catch. We think they are one of the culprits biting the actual gourds. The third bug issue we are fighting this year is hungry worms. We find them in the flowers in the evenings as we pollinate. We find them crawling on the fruits, and suspect they also are inflicting damage to the young gourds. Again, we squish all we find. See links below for more information on insect pests.

Another task for this month is supporting your hanging gourds by tying a rope around the stems and to the arbor. Do this with any gourds that reach approximately 2 or more pounds to protect the vines. You want a loose loop around the stem so you don't strangle growth. Tie it upwards to the arbor to create a little curve that will carry the weight of the gourd. We prefer to use bailing rope. We can loosen the rope fibers to create a wide place around the stem that gives more protection from cutting off nutrition. Really heavy varieties will need to be supported from the bottoms in slings. I have a lot of Mexican water bottle gourds from last year that have

cracks at the top from the weight of the gourds pulling down. This is, of course, not an issue if the vines are sprawling on the ground.

The hot days of July are great for manipulating the dipper gourds. Temperatures need to be above 85 F and humid for the baby gourds to be limp enough to bend. Even then, too much bending and they will snap with no warning. It is fun to tie knots in them and then let them grow that way. You can add bends and twists by tying a piece of stocking around the bulb of a gourd and then tying it to the arbor. You can tighten your ties twice a day to influence the growth directions. More than that and they will break. You can also place the baby gourds into molds to grow them in shapes.



Your gourds will want a steady source of water as they grow and develop. The old standard of an inch a week applies though if you have a giant variety, you will need to water it daily for best growth. We try not to let the gourds go more than three days between waterings. Their roots are a shallow web spread out under the the vines. They will dry out rapidly in the hot days of July and August.

I hope you are enjoying the magic of July in your own gourd patch. Don't forget to take lots of pictures.

Helpful links:

- 1) "Squash Bugs in Home Gardens", Suzanne Burkness and Jeffrey Hahn, University of Minnesota Extension, 2007, [Link](#)
- 2) "Cucumber, Squash, Melon & Other Cucurbit Insect Pests", Joey Williamson, Randall P. Griffin, Clemson Cooperative Extension, HGIC 2207, October 2016, [Link](#)
- 3) "Squash Bugs - Vegetables", University of Maryland Extension, [Link](#)
- 4) "Gourds", Michael N. Dana and B. Rosie Lerner, Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, HO-135-W, November 2000, [Link](#)
- 5) "Summer Growing Tips", John Sturgeon, The American Gourd Society, July 2000, [Seasonal Tips Link](#)