

GOURD PURSE WORKSHOP



This is going to be fun. Gourd purses are so totally unique and personal that you are simply making an expression of yourself. I have a hard time containing my excitement when I find a new gourd to work on. They are just too unusual to work with. They feel like (and can be handled) as though you are working with wood. However they are lighter and each one will be personal to you.

STEP ONE: Selecting and cleaning your gourd. I try very hard to chose a gourd that is symmetrical

and as free from blemishes as possible. You also want to decided if you need a stem or if you are going to insert a "plug" instead. I tend to use the stem as the closure if possible. I like the more rustic look. However, I have successfully used small wooden pegs if the stem is either broken off or is very soft and pithy. If you are going to use a peg, you must be sure that it is securely attached. After you chose your gourd, you are going to have to clean it thoroughly. That means a trip to the kitchen sink (or your favorite spa) and it needs to be soaked and then scrubbed. I use a metal scrubber on mine. I like to use Dawn dish detergent and then a quick rinse with Clorox. Make sure you dip it in Clorox as it retards any further mold or mildew growth. I have found that if you sit it outside in the sun to dry, it gets nice and dry quickly. If there are any holes in your gourd, you need to be sure that you allow that water to drain out prior to beginning the next process which is preparing the surface. Once it is dry, you can begin the process of preparing the surface for painting.

STEP TWO: This section deals with preparing the surface for painting. There are two separate schools of thought here. I have tried both and really don't have a preference. For those you who might be a bit faint of heart, you can cut your gourd at this point. For a more intricate pattern, I prefer to leave it whole and paint it while it is intact. This is a matter of preference and, it also depends on what you have in mind to paint. For example, my watermelons, I paint in their entirety. It is easier to make the pieces line up. If I were going to paint One Stroke flowers, I would cut it first. In either case, you must sketch out the cutting line. I use a chalk pencil as the graphite in a regular pencil is hard to cover with paint. It

tends to 'bleed' a bit. Do not cut your gourd in half. This will make it very shallow and you won't be able to put your 'things' in it very well. I tend to use my eye and divide it into thirds. You want to make your cut on the upper third of the purse. You can either cut it straight (using a band saw or a mini jig-saw) or you can cut a curve in the top. I achieve that by making a straight line (using a rubber band as the base line) and the taking a jar lid and using that for the "circle" and then turning it over for the leading edges. It works very well and you will get it straight every time! If you are going to paint first, then all you have to do is do the base-coating and then apply your line with chalk so you can be sure of where to put your designs.

STEP THREE: Cleaning and finishing the inside. If you are going to cut the gourd first and then paint it, I would suggest that you finish the inside first. I have used both fabric and tissue paper for the insides of mine. Best deal in the world is a package of tissue from the Dollar Store that you tear into small squares (about an inch) and then apply with a good grade of water-based polyurethane. I would not recommend a sponge brush for this as they tend to shed. Pour the poly into a small container and paint from that. It reduces the risk of "contamination" of gourd crumbs in the finish. That can be a mess. I keep one brush simply for using with the polyurethane. Nothing else touches that brush. That way you never have to worry about paint coming out or contamination of any other product that might not be compatible with your finish.

Cleaning must be done carefully. You don't want to chip the edge in any way or else it will not fit tightly. Do not be tempted to soak your gourd after cutting. It will cause it to warp. The top and bottom pieces will not meet nicely and you will be disappointed. Use whatever tool you prefer for removing the seeds and chaff. I have used an old serving spoon. You can purchase a gourd scraper if you want, or you can simply use a dowel with a large washer attached to the end. My Dad made me several and put them on the bench grinder and put an edge on them. They are very sharp and make wonderful tools for different sizes and shapes of gourds. If you don't have one of those, use whatever you have to get the inside clean and smooth.

If you decide to use fabric, I would suggest that you chose a small calico type of fabric. VIP prints are wonderful as they don't run. I personally like the dark backgrounds as they are most forgiving. Cut them into one inch squares...no larger than an inch and a half. If they are larger, they will get a wrinkle in them and that is annoying to deal with. Use the poly to glue them in. Let your purse dry for a minimum of 24 hours after this. Make sure that it is totally dry before you put a second coat on. I use about 4 thin coats. Remember, it is better to use several light coats than one heavy coat. You don't want a puddle in the center either. Stroke it



out while still wet. Get the fabric pieces all the way up to the edge as well. If it overhangs a bit, that is alright. You can always cut it off with a razor when it is totally dry and hard. Make sure that you manipulate the fabric so the pieces overlap and the entire inside of the gourd is covered. Make sure you get a nice smooth finish. Once the fabric has dried thoroughly (18 to 24 hours), apply a second coat of polyurethane. Allow to dry and then add a third and fourth coat of polyurethane using a soft bristled brush. Once this is done, allow to dry thoroughly and you can begin designing the outside of the gourd.

STEP FOUR: Finishing the outside of the purse is using your own imagination. Like I explained earlier, sometimes I have already painted the outside. In this case, you can skip this section. However, if you haven't yet painted the outside, here is how you do it. Using plenty of Blending Gel and a base color of your choice, apply 2 coats of paint to the gourd. I like the Blending Gel as I tend to get 'shoulders' in my basecoat and this helps me avoid them. If you have used filler on any irregularities, make sure you have sanded them carefully and you may even want to apply a coat of paint to the spots before you do the entire surface to assure that they will cover well. If you wish, you can use JW's First Step sealer before applying the paint. Keeping in mind your base-color, you can paint flowers or even apply decals or fabric cut-outs or even decopage type papers to the outside. Then, as you finished the inside using three to four coats of polyurethane, you complete the outside the same way. Once the polyurethane is dry, you can apply a coat of wax to the surface to really bring out the shine. I have used Pledge and then rubbed it well with my hand so that the water begins to 'bead up' on the surface and can be blotted away or, I prefer to use a carnauba based wax (Butcher's Wax or JW's Finishing Wax) to protect your work.

STEP FIVE: Now for the last part. The hardware. This is kind of tricky. You must look at the back side of the gourd and either measure or 'eye-ball' the back to see where the hinges need to go. They must be set symmetrically -- this is very important. Once you have figured out where the hinges should be placed, using half-inch tape, tape them in place. Using a drill bit of the correct size, punch a hole with an awl and then using the cordless drill, make the appropriate hole for the screws. Be sure that the hinges are in the correct place. The top on the top half and the bottom on the bottom half of the gourd. After drilling the holes, put the bolt bottoms on the screws. I never use wood screws. Only bolts that are the appropriate length and then nuts for the ends. When that is completed, you need to attach the handles. Using a the same cordless drill with a large bit, drill 2 holes - in a straight line -- one below and one

above - and then using a leather punch, punch holes in the leather handle. Make sure that you carefully gauge where the handle should be - either up higher or down lower in order for the purse to hang correctly. Finally, drill the holes for the leather strap. Using the Chicago bolts, attach the handle.

Now your purse is complete. Given care and occasional waxing, your purse should last for several years. Don't be afraid to use it. They only get better with time. And besides, if you want to be a special person who is known for originality, this is the way to do it.

