

Choose, Store and Decorate Pumpkins and Gourds for Fall Displays

Colorful gourds and pumpkins have become popular fall decorations. Choosing the best ones and storing them properly is a crucial step in creating an attractive seasonal display.

Choosing

According to Laurie Hodges, Ph.D., UNL vegetable specialist, you should look for pumpkins and gourds that are fully mature. Pumpkins should have hard shells with a shiny surface that can't be punctured by a fingernail. This test weeds out those that have been picked too early and will tend to rot. Also check for firm, bright green stems. Weak stems often are a sign that the plant had foliar disease. Mature gourds will be a dull color and will have stems or vines that are totally dry. Do not test gourds with a fingernail, as this may puncture or dent the skin and reduce the quality of the gourd.

Once the shell and stem have passed quality tests, pumpkin and gourd choices are purely personal. Misshapen ones are as safe to eat or handle as uniform ones. Blue pumpkins, white pumpkins, small pie pumpkins and other less common varieties are becoming increasingly popular.

After choosing pumpkins and gourds, there are many choices as to how to use them. Besides using them for cooking



upturned flower pot or on top of a couple bricks.

Carving

Avoid carving pumpkins more than a week before they'll be displayed, as they'll spoil more quickly.

Polishing

Polishing decorative pumpkins is another popular preparation for display.

Acrylic liquid floor wax and polyurethane spray work well and make the pumpkin shiny. Be sure not to eat pumpkins that have been treated in this way.

Drying

To dry gourds, leave them in an area that has good ventilation and is warm and dry, such as a garage or attic. Gourds should not touch each other while drying. They will shrink as they dry. Different sized gourds require different amounts of time to dry, but expect to wait several months. One way to tell if a gourd is dry is by shaking it. If the seeds can be heard rattling, it likely has dried.

A layer of mold may develop on the gourd during the drying process. Leave the mold until the gourd is completely dry; it usually will wash off then or can be rubbed off with a rough cloth or fine sandpaper. Dried gourds, if kept dry, will last indefinitely.

or other purposes, pumpkins and gourds may be carved, dried, polished or decorated. However, they must be stored properly so they don't rot.

Washing

Washing and disinfecting pumpkins and gourds is not required, but it often helps them keep longer. Wipe down or wash the exterior with a dilute bleach solution, about one tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water. This removes surface bacteria and fungal spores.

Storing

After cleaning them, store the pumpkins or gourds in cool C but not freezing C dry locations where there is some air circulation, such as in a basement or garage. Keep them off the ground to prevent moisture from accumulating around them and causing them to rot. To do so, many growers store the pumpkins or gourds on straw. Other options include inside a cardboard box, on an



Photos by Soni Cochran, UNL Extension in Lancaster County

Re-flowering Poinsettias

The poinsettia is a photoperiod plant, which means it begins to set buds and produce flowers as the winter nights become longer. The plants will naturally come into full bloom during January or February depending upon the flowering response time of the particular variety. This can be tricky to do outside of a controlled greenhouse environment, because any stray artificial light such as that from a street light, pool light or household lamp could delay or halt the re-flowering of the plants.

Starting October 1, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. This can be accomplished by moving the plants to a dark room or placing a large box over them. During this period, the plants require six to eight hours of bright sunlight and night temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F. If the temperature is too high or too low, the setting of the flower buds may be delayed or halted. The blooming process may also be delayed or disrupted by any stray light that may shine near the plants during the critical darkness period. This regime must continue for approximately eight to ten weeks in order for the plants to develop a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season. Obviously, the re-flowering process takes more than a little vigilance, perseverance and patience to be successful.



University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension presents a series of programs, entitled Acreage Insights-Rural Living Clinics, targeting acreage owners and specifically designed to provide knowledge and skills to better manage a rural living environment.

The following clinics will be held in Lincoln at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road from 7-9 p.m.

For more information, contact Sarah Browning at (402) 727-2775.

REGISTRATION FORM

PLEASE CHECK WHICH CLINIC(S) YOU ARE REGISTERING FOR

Weed Control on the Acreage

Lincoln - Oct. 12

Nebraska Friendly Landscapes

Lincoln - Nov 16

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

\$10/person advanced registration,
\$15/person at the door
Preregistration deadline:
3 working days before clinic.

Number attending _____

Amount enclosed \$ _____

Mail completed registration form and check (payable to UNL Extension) to:
UNL Extension in Dodge County
Acreage Insights
1206 W. 23rd St.
Fremont, NE 68025

We assure reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. For assistance, or if you require language interpretation, contact Extension in Dodge County at (402) 727-2775 three weeks prior to date of clinic.

Thursday, Oct. 12



Weed Control on the Acreage

Living in the country just means you have more weeds to control. Learn how to identify and control many of the common weeds. You will learn about chemical and cultural control methods for specific weeds based on the weed's life cycle and its most vulnerable growth stage.

Thursday, Nov. 16



Nebraska-Friendly Landscapes

Nebraska-friendly landscapes enhance our living area by conserving and protecting water resources, providing biodiversity in plantings, conserving energy and more. Learn design principles, plant placement, maintenance, and plants for a Nebraska-friendly landscape.

"Well organized and presented. Very thorough - answered all questions we had before we needed to ask!"

- previous clinic attendee



CLINICS ARE \$10/PERSON ADVANCED REGISTRATION; \$15/PERSON AT THE DOOR

Preregistration deadline is 3 working days before clinic.

If a minimum number of pre-registrants is not received, clinics will be cancelled - preregistered participants will be notified and receive a full refund.