



When fashioned into a floor lamp, gourds can light up your light.

## Homestead Notes

# Gourd

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the vines before the first frost, if they are maturing properly. Following killing frost, they should be picked with as much stem remaining as possible.

"Don't pick them up by the stems," Ruth says adamantly. Stems are both brittle and fragile and break off easily.

Mature gourds should be left outside or kept perhaps in an unheated garage or porch area all winter to finish hardening the shell. The largest bushel gourd takes up to eight months to fully cure so that the surface does not scratch in use.

After curing, gourds should be set out in the rain or kept damp in a plastic bag overnight to soften the rough outer skin so it can be removed to expose the smooth, inner shell layer. Shells can be sanded and sealed with acrylic sprays, painted decoratively, or left to their own natural warm-beige-colored beauty. Ruth often uses a wood-burning etching tool to fashion designs on the hardened gourd surface.

When Ruth wants to save seeds from a gourd she has grown, she checks at least six seeds with a pliers to see if the inside is fleshy. Masses of seeds passing the pliers test are swished in a container of water to loosen the dried membranes, then rubbed dry between towels. After the seeds are well air-dried, they are stored in zipper plastic bags in a cool, dry place. Ruth suggests that gourd seed be held no longer than three years.

"The best way to get seeds, though, is to join the American Gourd Society," Ruth believes.

This organization of more than 6,000 members from around the world is 30 years old and headquartered in Mt. Gilead, Ohio. Their newsletters, put out several times per year, features gourd growers, creative ideas, tips on cultivation and seed exchange and sales ads.

The Gourd Society also keeps members up-to-date on the latest gourd show happenings and annually sponsors the world's largest gourd show. Ruth and her late husband L.M. began attending the Gourd Society's show many years ago. Friendships, fellowship, and gourd competitions keep drawing her back to the annual early October event. In fact, devising creative gourd designs for the

show's competition often begins for Ruth even before the previous show ends.

She has won numerous awards, from her bird house creations of dipper gourds to the gourd fashion accessories she designs. While Ruth picks up new ideas from events like the Ohio gathering, she is just as likely to pass on her own creative techniques at this world's largest gathering of gourd-enthusiasts.

Ruth Sweitzer encourages beginning and veteran gardeners and craftspersons who interested in more information on gourds to join the American Gourd Society, Inc., P. O. Box 274, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, 43338.

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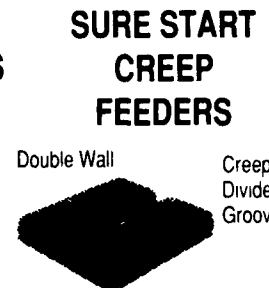
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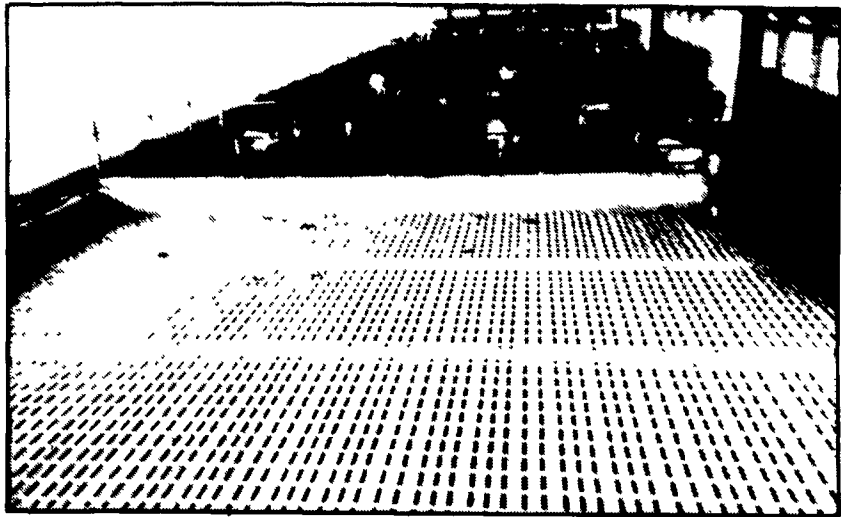
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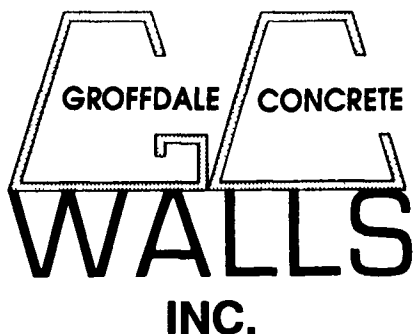
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