



Arizona Gourds



February updates from the desert southwest...

Welcome to the February issue of the Arizona Gourds newsletter!

I will be attending the Wuertz Gourd Festival and will be away from February 1-4. Orders placed during this time will be shipped after I return. Stock may be somewhat depleted after the show but every effort will be made to get your order filled as quickly as possible.

I will have a booth at space D8. Please be sure to stop by to say hello!

In addition to crafted gourds and gourd supplies, I will have autographed copies of my new book. If you haven't already purchased your copy, this will be a great opportunity to see a copy and add one to your library.

Update: Gourd Classes

Still a few spaces in the "Added Lids" class on February 24th that will be held at my home in Tucson; check the [classes](#) page for other class availability. More Tucson classes will be added in the fall and I may also offer an indoor "Closed Coiling" class over the summer.

*If you would like to get notice of classes as soon as they are posted, then please add your name to my classes updates email list. People on this list will get the news first and have the best opportunity to select the dates and classes they prefer.



Upcoming East Coast Classes! I will be teaching weekend classes at the Gourd Gallery in Sugarloaf, NY, April 14-15. Contact Devon Cameron at gourdgallery@frontiernet.net for more information

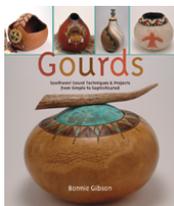
Advanced Carving workshop - A two day workshop on high relief and advanced carving techniques taught by Bonnie Gibson and Phyllis Sickles. The March session is now full, but please send me an email if you are interested in taking the class in the future. If there is enough interest, we will schedule it again.

What's new on the [Arizona Gourds](#) website?

NOW AVAILABLE!!

Gourds Southwest Gourd Techniques & Projects from Simple to Sophisticated

All books I ship will be **autographed**. Please click on the book cover for ordering information. *I will also have copies available at the Wuertz Festival.



Some comments from people that have already received their copy :

I received my copy of Bonnie's new book and have been immersed in it since. It is a beautiful book with wonderful colour illustrations and great project/technique information. The sections on tool selection and use are right on. The information is written in straight forward language. I can't say enough good things about this book. It is ideal for beginners and experienced gourd artisans alike.

Your autographed book arrived today and what an amazing book it is!!!!!! I've been reading it cover to cover all afternoon.

I was on vacation when my book arrived at my house, I couldn't wait to get home to read it. Thank you so much for such a great book. It is filled with so much information. I just keep reading it over and over. I like to carve, but always found it took so long to take the top skin off the gourd. After reading about the burrs and how to hold your hand, I finally enjoyed carving today.

*Your book is so wonderful - I just keep going back through all of the projects - they are **all** just awesome!*

*I got your new book for my birthday and it is signed by you on the inside. **I LOVE it**. It is a wonderful book, The pictures are great and the diversity of the techniques are awesome. There isn't a book out there like it. I couldn't pick a favorite if I had to, you have really bumped up the learning curve for techniques.*

I want to thank everyone that has sent such nice comments about the book! It has really thrilled me to hear that people feel the book was worth the long wait. I appreciate all your kind words.

*I understand that [Amazon](#) has finally begun shipping copies as well. I hope that some of you readers will take a few moments to add a short book review to the Amazon site. Lots of people enjoy reading the reviews before they purchase a new book and your input may help them make their decision.



February Feature Article: Gourds in History

The following article was written by Scott Nelson, a gourd enthusiast currently living in Virginia, where he grows and crafts gourds, and is active in gourd education in the local community. He has done a lot of research to compile this fascinating information about the history of gourds. If you have questions or comments on any of the information, you may contact Scott directly at sensen98@excite.com

While there is no definite proof, plant geographers believe gourds have been cultivated by our species for a minimum of thirty thousand years - making it by far the oldest cultivated plant on earth. Who'd a thunk that the little gourd you are painting for a friend is the **OLDEST CULTIVATED PLANT ON EARTH**.

The origin of cultivated Lagenarias remains something of a mystery; they are unquestionably one of the earliest cultigens, and it is quite interesting that the nature of early agriculture focused not on food production, but utility. In other words, if you are going to grow wheat, rice, barley, etc, you **FIRST** have to have something to carry the grain in. A slab of bark? A big leaf? Hollowed out tree branch? None of them would work as well as the light weight, durable gourd. Even carrying water, or a burning coal for the next fire would be easier. Makes sense doesn't it?

Wild gourds in the genus Lagenaria are African. The wild gourd has a thin rind that quickly decays, releasing its seeds. In contrast, the domesticated gourd has a much thicker rind which is more resistant to decay. The domesticated bottle gourd is unable to survive without people, who release the seeds from their imprisonment within the gourd. Which means, to keep gourds around **WE** have to propagate them, not nature. Isn't that neat? With out us, gourds would become extinct. So keep those gardens going.

*A little side note to gardeners. When planting your gourd seeds, plant them sideways. Why? Well, think about how plants spread their seeds. When a seed falls to the ground, it doesn't land point or butt first. It lands sideways. So, doesn't it make sense to imitate what nature has already perfected?

Here is an unusual use of gourds! In the Popul Vuh - a pre-Columbian document of the Kiche people of Central America - a **BOMB** is mentioned: It's a gourd filled with live hornets. I can only imagine, in a feud/war, how nice it would be to have a stash of those around the house. And not much fun to be on the receiving end of the "first ever" hand grenade.

Gourds are even mentioned in the Bible.

"And the Lord God Prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. SO Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." *Jonah 4:6*

"And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof." *2 Kings 4:39-40*

It is believed that the banjo originally came from the Gambia/Senegal area of Africa, and is the only recognized instrument invented solely in the United States. Originally called the Banjar among other names by the colonists, it was integrated into society by the slaves and indentured blacks around the Chesapeake Bay in the 1600's. That's the second time gourds were introduced to America. The first of course were the ones brought via the land bridge between Russia and Alaska, or floated over from the Polynesian/Hawaiian Islands to America'

Polynesian
Gourd Mask



*Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom
if you follow the Drinking Gourd.*

*"From 'Follow The Drinking Gourd" - a song from the
Underground Railroad*

Hawaiians had over 41 uses for the gourd, and now evidence shows that the gourd originated in Africa, but came to the North and South American continent via Asia rather than floating over from Africa to South America as originally believed. They've found gourd rinds in graves dating back over 9000 years, and have found gourd seeds in Mastodon dung in Florida dating back to 9000 years. In fact the Incas used pieces of gourd covered with gold to fill in holes in the skulls of patients they operated on and had to remove parts of the bone. They even kept bee hives in gourds. Easier to harvest the honey.

Not to mention all the medical uses by the Chinese, who even made cricket cages from gourds to keep their fighting and pet crickets in. Snuff boxes in Africa, India, and China. Powder horns for the colonist's, even sock darners. Egg gourds were used as sock darners in the 1600 & 1700's until wood, metal and plastic replaced them. As you can see, the simple gourd has in it's own small way made an impact worldwide!

**Do you have a tip or tutorial we can feature here? Please [contact me](#).*

Tip of the Month: Inexpensive replacement blades for Microlux jigsaws

This tip works best for the mini jig saw and cross saw (ball foot saw) that are made by Microlux. Instead of buying the replacement blades, you can also use scroll saw blades in this type of mini saw. It really does not matter what brand or if they are pin or straight end blades, as long as they will fit into the blade holder (the slot on the saw). All brands of scroll saw blades will work, but try to find some in the same thickness as the original blade. Thinner blades may work but won't perform as well; thicker blades won't fit into the slot. A package of scroll saw blades will normally contain 5 or 6 blades that are 5 inches in length and will run \$3 - \$6 depending on brand and where you purchase them. You can find them at almost any hardware store.

Clip the blades to the appropriate length (approximately one inch or just a bit longer) with a pair of heavy wire cutters. You'll have to squeeze your cutters HARD!!! You should get several mini blades from one scroll saw blade. Be sure to insert them so the cutting teeth face the correct direction.

*I've not had as much success finding substitutes for the larger blades used in other brands of saws - most substitutes I've tried are too thin and don't perform as well. A thicker blade is needed for the Proxxon, Minicraft and Gourd Saws. (You can find regular replacement blades at the bottom of the [Mini Tools](#) page.)

Featured Gourd of the Month: **Gourd Kalimba**

The article about the history of gourds made me think about my gourd kalimba. A kalimba is a modern version of the African "Mbira". This kalimba was built from a canteen gourd and a preassembled kit; other gourd shapes could have been used..

(Want to build your own? Kalimba kits are available on the [Musical Supplies page](#)..

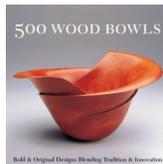


Above: A top view showing the metal tines that are plucked with your thumbs to play music. This gourd kalimba has one octave. I'm not a musician myself, but I love hearing others play tunes on it. It can be retuned by slightly sliding the metal tines in and out of the clamping bar.

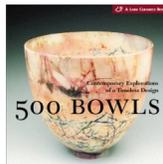


Side view. This is one of the few gourds where I actually used leather dye to create a tortise shell effect.

Featured Books of the Month:



[500 Wood Bowls](#)



[500 Bowls](#)

The "500" series of books published by Lark are wonderful design and idea books. Even though the mediums used are as diverse as ceramics and wood, the photographs provide plenty of design inspirations to take you in new directions with gourd art. If you like these, you'll enjoy all the other titles from the "500" series:

["500 Series"](#)

***I personally own copies of several "500" titles and have gotten some great ideas from them. I'll have a couple of copies at the Wuertz festival if you want to check them out in person.**

**Be sure to visit all these different book pages to see some of the many other titles that are available. Click on each topic to see a variety of books about each subject.*

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