

Flora & Fauna

Fall Craft Idea: Painting Gourds

The fruits and vegetables of fall make wonderful, hearty meals that we often associate with family and prosperity. Gourds (pumpkins, melons and squash) not only make terrific meals, but they also make beautiful decorations for any home. If you're looking for a fun project to do, or want to create a centerpiece for the table, consider painting some gourds.

Step 1) Choose a pattern. Painting on gourds can be fun for all levels of crafters and painters and you'll get beautiful results by using a pre-made pattern. Look through coloring books or observe the fabric designs in your home. Use a photocopier to enlarge or reduce your pattern if necessary.

Step 2) Choose a gourd or pumpkin that compliments your pattern. There are many shapes and beautiful colors like yellow, green, and even natural speckled patterns that will look terrific with your design.

Step 3) Make sure your gourd is clean, dry and fresh before applying your pattern. You can draw the pattern free-hand, use graphite paper, or a dull toothpick to transfer your design.

Step 4) Before you paint, use a paint sealer on your gourd. This will help prevent your paint from chipping off. If you are not using the natural background of your pumpkin, you will need to apply 2-3 coats of basecoat over the sealer. Spray paint can be used for faster results. You can also use a "wash" of 1/2 paint and 1/2 water applied in long even strokes to achieve a sheer, antique look.

Step 5) Paint away!

Step 6) After painting your pumpkin, use the same spray sealer over your dried paintwork to protect it further.

Gourds are considered a seasonal plant and will spoil if proper care is not taken. Under the right conditions, you can enjoy your painted gourds for many months. Gourds should not be stacked; they need fresh air circulation and should be stored in a dry cool place. Space them apart from one another - gourds are like apples, a bad one could spoil the whole bunch!

If you display your painted pumpkins outside, make sure to bring them in at night to prevent them from freezing.

Other than paint, gourds can be embellished using a wide variety of crafting supplies. Most decorations can be attached using a hot glue gun or craft glue.

Gourds can be decorated with any theme or idea in mind. If you are painting your gourd to look like a person, you can make wigs out of doll hair, curling ribbon, fake fur, straw, bendable wire... the list goes on and on! Adding a straw hat to a scarecrow or a red bandana to a cowboy painted pumpkin can really bring it to life.

Want another fun idea? Paint a pumpkin white. Then add small wooden wheels, touches of gold spray paint, and glitter or jewels. You'll transform an ordinary pumpkin into Cinderella's fancy pumpkin coach!

For a whimsical centerpiece, turn your gourd into a watermelon, sunflower, ladybug or other seasonal symbol. The possibilities are endless!

GUARANTEE@ SYSTEM.

1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
Phone: 616-451-0787
www.guaranteesystem.com

Cleaning Corner: Clean Your Shower

Here are a few helpful hints that will help repel unsightly soap scum and mineral deposits from your shower doors and walls.

- 1) **Use spray-on car wax.** Follow the instructions on the bottle. **Be sure to cover the floor of the tub/shower with plastic or newspaper before applying; you could unintentionally cause the floor to be slippery.*
- 2) **Use Cascade® dishwasher liquid and rubber gloves** (it can irritate the skin). Wring out a wet sponge and apply the Cascade to it. Then scrub the new shower doors. **Be sure to rinse the floor of the tub/shower; it can become slippery.*
- 3) **Use old dryer sheets.** Wet a sheet and gently rub it on the shower doors. It will create a white film, but don't worry. Take a cup filled with water and rinse the film away. What you are left with is a fine coating of generic repellent. You will need to repeat this at least once a week, depending on how frequently the shower is used. **Again, be sure to rinse the floor of the tub/shower - it can get slippery!*

November

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| 1048 | All Soul's Day is instituted to honor the departed; particularly those in purgatory |
| 1512 | Sistine Chapel ceiling art by Michelangelo is unveiled to the public |
| 1604 | Shakespeare's "Othello" debuts |
| 1800 | John Adams was the first U. S. president to live in the White House |
| 1870 | The U.S. Weather Bureau begins operation at 24 locations around the country |
| 1879 | Newspapers report a six-day race between a man and a horse was won by the animal |
| 1939 | U.S. government authorities authorize the first cash-and-carry arms sale policy |
| 1952 | Clarence Birdseye begins marketing his invention: frozen peas |
| 1991 | TV's "Full House" celebrates 100 episodes. |

Health Tips: Coping with Holiday Stress

The holidays really are the best of times and the worst of times. Our tidings of comfort and joy can so easily be devoured by the insatiable stress to do it all, be it all and buy it all. For some people, the holidays can bring some unwelcome guests: stress and depression. And it's no wonder. In an effort to pull off a perfect Hallmark holiday, you might find yourself facing a dizzying array of demands - work, parties, shopping, , cleaning, caring for elderly parents or young kids, and scores of other chores.

However, with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress and depression that often accompany the holidays. You may even end up enjoying them more than you thought you would!

Fun holiday stress relievers:

- 1) **Try a winter picnic.** Pack a hearty soup or chili and picnic by a frozen pond. Stay warm by a fire or go iceskating.
- 2) **Spread some cheer.** Volunteer at a soup kitchen, donate to the local food bank or wrap and deliver gifts for Toys for Tots®.
- 3) **Have a snowman building contest** in your neighborhood.
- 4) **Invent your own healthy festive drink**, such as a non-alcoholic cranberry concoction or hot spiced cider.
- 5) **Indulge in a spa experience at home.** Light a candle, fluff some towels, gather some bath products and just relax!
- 6) **Remember the reason for the season.** Take the time and effort to reaffirm what this season really means to you, whether it is about family, community, religion, etc.

Holiday Organization Tips (that will also alleviate stress!):

- 1) **Get your holiday shopping done now!** 'Tis the season for gift giving – but shopping at the mall, especially the day after Thanksgiving, can be like entering a war zone! Choose a day in the middle of the week to get your shopping done, or even better, shop online.
- 2) **Organize your gift-wrapping paper.** Make sure you have plenty of holiday paper, tissue paper, ribbon, tags, tape, and scissors. You can purchase storage bins (flat ones that roll under the bed or upright ones that store easily in a closet) to keep your supplies together.
- 3) **Make a list of friends and family to whom you want to send Christmas cards.** Start putting together all the names and addresses now so you're not hunting for them when it's time to send cards out later.
- 4) **If you're hosting a holiday get-together, make a list of dishes that family members can bring.** You can reduce your cooking and cleaning responsibility by assigning dishes (or, more tactfully, offering relatives their choice of which dish to bring). Likewise, be sure to ask which dish you can bring if you're visiting another relative's home.
- 5) **Make a list of family chores to be done before the relatives come over.** Assign vacuuming, cleaning the bathroom, sweeping the hallways, etc. You shouldn't have to do all the work!

Kid Corner: Childhood Obesity

Between the candy binge at Halloween, the incessant gobbling at Thanksgiving, and the flurry of food that fuels the resolutions of the new year, it's a good time to think about obesity. Obesity is particularly worrisome in kids, since it can lead to habits and diseases that are difficult to reverse in adulthood. Today, 65% of all Americans adults are overweight or obese. If current trends continue, that percentage will rise even higher as this generation of children reach adulthood.

Here are the facts:

- **Soaring Rates:** The number of overweight children and adolescents ages 6-19 has tripled in the last 40 years.
- **Diabetes is on the Rise:** The rise in childhood obesity is linked to a dramatic rise in the number of children suffering from type II diabetes, something that was previously thought to be an adult-only disease.
- **Overweight Toddlers:** More than 10% of children between the ages of 2 and 5 are overweight.
- **Carrying Health Problems into Adulthood:** Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.

How did this happen?

- **Eating Out More:** Thirty years ago, most meals were prepared and eaten at home. In 2004, Americans spent ten times more eating out than in 1974. Over the last thirty years, Americans' spending on fast food has increased from \$6 billion to \$110 billion.
- **Portions are Growing:** Adolescents today are eating on average 8% more than they were less than 30 years ago.
- **Too Much Sugar:** The USDA recommends eating no more than 10 teaspoons of added sugar per day. One can of soda is over one and a half times that!
- **Poor Nutrition:** Only 3 out of 10 of high school seniors report eating green vegetables nearly every day or more.
- **Less Physical Education:** 92% of elementary schools don't have daily physical education classes year-round.
- **Disappearing Recess:** Nearly one-third of elementary schools do not schedule recess on a regular basis.
- **Increasing Screen-Time:** A typical American youth spends approximately 4-5 hours a day watching TV, using the computer or playing video games.

What can you do?

1. **Reestablish a sit-down meal together.**
2. **Three words: Unplug the TV.**
3. **Schedule family activities** – bike riding, a walk, roller skating, or play games like Twister®, tag, and hide n' seek.
4. **Pack healthy lunches** for school instead of giving your child money for the cafeteria or vending machines.

- 1 spaghetti squash
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup bouillon
- 1 eggplant, cubed
- 1 28-oz can of plum tomatoes, undrained, chopped
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- Pinch cayenne, or to taste
- 4 small zucchini, sliced
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil leaves (optional)
- juice of 1 lemon

1. Puncture the skin of the squash with a knife in 3-4 places. Cook it in the microwave for 3 minutes, or until it is soft enough to cut easily. Allow it to cool so you can handle it. Cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds and discard them.
2. Place squash halves cut-side down on a plate and return them to the microwave for another 8-10 minutes. Cool. Run a fork over the flesh to separate it into spaghetti-like strands and scoop them out of the shells.
2. Prepare the ratatouille sauce: In a large pot, cook the onion, peppers and garlic in the bouillon to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the eggplant, tomatoes and spices. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer 20 minutes or until the eggplant is tender, stirring occasionally and adding more bouillon if necessary. Add the zucchini, basil and lemon juice and simmer another 5 minutes, or until the zucchini is tender but still bright green.
3. Place some of the cooked spaghetti squash strands in each serving bowl and top with the ratatouille sauce.

Thanksgiving Day History

Sarah Josepha Hale, the author of the popular children's poem, "Mary Had a Little Lamb," wrote a letter to President Lincoln in 1863 urging him to have the "day of our annual Thanksgiving made a National and fixed Union Festival." She wrote, "You may have observed that, for some years past, there has been an increasing interest felt in our land to have the Thanksgiving held on the same day, in all the States; it now needs National recognition and authoritative fixation." On October 3, 1863 Lincoln issued a proclamation that set apart the last Thursday of November "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise."

Hiring a Pet Sitter

When you must be away from home—say for travel or an emergency—and don't want to leave your pet in a boarding kennel, who takes care of your pet? If you're like many pet owners, you ask a friend or neighbor for help. But if your friends and neighbors lack proper pet-care experience, or have started to resent your frequent requests to look after your pet, it may be time to consider hiring a "pet sitter."

A pet sitter offers many benefits. In addition to providing your pet with food and water, a good pet sitter also spends quality time with your pet, gives him exercise and knows how to tell if your pet needs veterinary attention. What's more, pet sitters typically offer additional services such as bringing in mail and newspapers, watering plants, turning lights on and off and providing homes with a lived-in look to deter crime.

To find a pet sitter, start with a recommendation from a friend, neighbor, veterinarian, or humane society. You can also contact the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (800-296-PETS) for a referral. It offers pet-sitter accreditation to those who demonstrate professional experience, complete pet-care-related home study courses, attend professional conferences and abide by a code of ethics.

Before selecting a pet sitter, here are some interview questions to ask:

- Can he/she provide written proof of commercial liability insurance (to cover accidents and negligence)?
- Is he/she bonded (to protect against theft by a pet sitter or her employees)?
- What training has the pet sitter received?
- What will happen if the pet sitter experiences car trouble or becomes ill?
- Can the pet sitter provide you with references?

Of course, even the most trustworthy, experienced pet sitter will have trouble if you haven't also kept your end of the bargain. Here are your responsibilities:

- Ensure your pet is well socialized and allows strangers to handle him.
- Leave clear instructions emergency contact information, including how to reach you and your veterinarian.
- Leave pet food and supplies in one place.
- Buy extra supplies in case you're away longer than planned.
- Leave a key with a trustworthy neighbor as a backup.

Finally, remember to bring your pet sitter's phone number in case your plans change—or you just want to find out how Fluffy and Fido are doing.

Carpet Talk: Stop Carpet Abuse!

Your carpets take a lot more abuse than you realize, and we're not just talking about the occasional spots and spills. Daily wear and tear can really take its toll on your carpet and shorten its life. Carpeting is an expensive investment and we want to help you protect that investment. Here are a few signs your carpet is in trouble and how to rectify the problems. As always, make sure to have regular professional cleanings at least once a year.

- 1) **Sprouting:** Shoe nails, pet claws or defective cleaning equipment can pull tufts above the level of the carpet. To prevent additional problems, use a sharp pair of scissors to trim the excess tufts as soon as you notice them.
- 2) **Shedding:** These short, broken fibers can be trapped during the yarn-making process. After your carpet is installed, they may show up as fuzz. While some is normal in high quality spun yarn, it's best to get these fibers up and out by vacuuming to eliminate the problem.
- 3) **Shading:** Heavy traffic causes carpet pile to lie in a variety of directions, so tufts remaining upright appear darker than compressed fibers. A thorough vacuuming or combing will rectify the situation so pile wears uniformly.
- 4) **Pilling:** The small, fuzzy balls that stick to carpet surfaces are caused when strong, unbroken fibers cling to weak ones. Most often, the cause is using old cleaning equipment, so ask your carpet care professional to inspect your vacuum and other cleaning tools. Pets may also be the culprits, too.
- 5) **Furniture dents:** Finally decided to rearrange the living after 20 years? You can try getting rid of those unsightly dents by holding a steam iron over (never against) the indented pile, then gently brushing the area.



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1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

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Phone: 616-451-0787

Fax: 616-451-8303

www.guaranteesystem.com

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