

## A New World Record of 126.5 2006 Long Gourd Season

I remember the first time I had seen a long gourd. It was about 12 years ago at Pezza Farm and Garden Center. They had some gourds from Italy that were drying out and had packets of seeds for sale. I was amazed at how big they were and decided to try growing them in our garden. We managed to grow some that were about 3' to 4' long and used them for fall decorations that year.

I went to the NEPGA summer picnic tour two years ago and saw how long gourds should be grown. There were long gourds hanging from a trellis at Bob Duffy's patch, nice and long and straight. I thought I would like to try growing them like that.

At the winter seminar in Ontario, Canada, I sought out Al Eaton for information. Al had been growing long gourds and I knew he could get me started. He was more than happy to give me some seeds and some tips on how to grow them. He explained how growing long gourds are much less time consuming than growing pumpkins. They need very little room to grow and you are not constantly burying vines and weeding. Al mentioned that germinating long gourd seeds may be a little bit harder than pumpkins and gave me some "practice" seeds to try first. I cut the very tip off, filed the edges and soaked them overnight in warm water. I placed them in a damp paper towel and placed them in a plastic bag in an 80 degree cabinet for three days. At that point you could see a small root starting to protrude from the seed. I placed them in 8" pots and set them on a warming mat. In three days they were up.

My soil prep was done in early April in an old 20' x20' vegetable garden that I hadn't used in about 4 years. I added 2 yards of cow manure, 2 yards of compost, one bag of gypsum and ½ bag of lime in a raised bed about 12' long and 4' wide at the edge of the garden. I put ½ cup each of mycorrhizal fungi and dry blood in a 2' radius on each planting hole. They received a foliar spray of sea weed and a soil drench of Neptune Harvest Fish and Seaweed weekly. My spraying schedule was the same as my pumpkins.

I started my seeds on the first of May and put them in my pumpkin greenhouse soon after they were up. I transplanted them in the garden in early June and left them in a greenhouse throughout the month of June. My son and I built the trellis on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. We used 12' long 2 x 4's for legs 46" on center and 12' long 2 x 6's for rafters. We stapled 4' wide 6"x 6" cattle fencing up one side and over the top of the trellis. Our finished trellis was 12' x 12' x12' which supported 3 long gourd plants. By now our plants were 6' to 7' long and growing very fast. By the end of the July they completely covered the trellis. They were 25 feet long and were 100 sq. each. I pruned them to four feet wide. I started to pollinate the gourds.

Long gourds flower at night covering the trellis with hundreds of white flowers. I hand pollinated at around 9 p.m. with a miners' flashlight strapped to my forehead. That way I have both hands free to do my pollinating as I stood on a 6' step ladder. By holding the female long

gourd flower upright, I gently tapped some pollen grains onto the stigmas. I had 100% pollination rate and by the second week in August started to cull to the 5 best growing gourds which were about 3' long at that time.

My wife and I went out to southern Oregon to the PGVG summer patch tour and had a great time. Seeing all the growers and their patches was a great experience. What a beautiful part of the country. I would like to thank to my very good friend Steve Sperry for taking care of my pumpkins and long gourds while we were away. The gourds must have grown 30 to 42 inches the week we were gone!

As the long gourds started to get heavy, I realized that I needed to support them. I learned this the hard way one night when I heard a thump while working in the pumpkin patch. One of the gourds had broken off the trellis. I tied the rest of them around the top with some old nylon hosiery fastened to the trellis. I placed pieces of garden hose around the wire above the gourds to keep the wire trellis from cutting them. When the gourds were about 8' long, I drove stakes into the ground on either side of each gourd, placed foam padding and tied the gourd to the stakes to keep it from swaying. We measured daily from about three weeks on, and when they stopped growing, we harvested them.

Before we cut the gourd off the vine, I made a support board from two pieces of wood 1"x4"xby11' long screwed together at a 90 degree angle. We stood it up against the gourd and used stretch rap tape to hold it firmly to the boards. Then I cut the stem. What a relief to get it down in one piece!

I would like to encourage anyone who enjoys gardening to someday give long gourds a try. I think you will be truly amazed at how much fun they can be. There is a great article about growing long gourds by John and Chris Lyons that is a must read. You can find it on the GVGO web site. I would like to thank them for all the info. It certainly was a great help to me!

Joe Jutras

