

Hot Tips For Gourd Burning

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Date: Unknown

When I started burning gourds about 4 years ago, it was with a simple wood burning tool left over from somebody's childhood. My work, most of that first year was done with that instrument. At that time I remembered my fascination with a wood plaque I found in a drawer in the garage when I was really small. It was a wood burning of baby birds my Dad had done in his youth. When I was old enough to keep from burning my fingers, I often borrowed my brothers' wood burners and did things like toadstools on shingles or horse heads on slabs of bark. Later as a Scout Leader and parent, wood burning was an often used activity. All the fun and enjoyment of those days seem to have resulted in the renewed interest I'm now experiencing in burning, known as "pyrography", and the gourd is an even more enjoyable medium. It's usually a form of relaxation, though there are times I feel pressured to increase output or fill orders or make Show deadlines, or write articles for whatever purpose or prepare a program for some organization or school.

The advancements in wood burning systems was a pleasant discovery a few years ago, and made work easier and faster. Most of these systems cost from \$100 to \$200, and easily handle any gourd burning imagined. The system I use is a Detail Master IV "Sabre", and is distributed by Leisure Time Products, River Grove, Ill. The "Sabre" has a single frontal jack and heats and cools from 00 to nearly 20000 in a few seconds. It has a variable setting dial numbering from 1 to 10 and I usually bum at 511zor 6. I don't know what exact degree that is, but it sizzles the accidentally touched fingers. I assume that the dual socket systems, like the "Excalibre" and "Presentation" systems, also by Detail Master, have their advantages, but I seem to be able to use only one hand piece at a time. Ambidextrous? NOT. The rapid heating and cooling function, not like the old days of plug in and unplug, makes an easy change of handpieces.

There are over 30 hand pieces or "pen" varieties from which to choose and cost about \$20 each. I have 3 of these varieties, I-A, I-B, and 3-A, but I have more than one of the I-A. This enables me to have a couple of back-up hand pieces when one breaks or bums out, so work doesn't have to stop for repairs. The finer pens bum out more quickly and the aforementioned company I deal with by mail, will repair the hand pieces at half their original cost. I usually mail 3 or 4 at a time for repair.

There really are no big deal secrets about this craft, just experimentation and practice and good equipment. Perhaps there are secrets and I just don't know them. Gourds have "hot spots" or "thin spots" and until accustomed to working with gourds, I'd suggest starting on an imperfect specimen or pieces, to get the feel of this crafting. The thickness of each gourd varies of course with the growth process and maturity, no matter what variety of gourd you have. My preference is nearly always a "green cleaned" gourd, but I also like the mottled effect attained by the "other" cleaning methods. The type of work I do dictates my choice of gourd surface.

Usually I begin by sketching an outline with pencil to judge the overall size and appearance of the design, then I woodburn those lines, and the remaining details. Pencil marks are easily erased. If you're not particularly good at sketching or ideas, patterns can be applied with carbon paper or whatever other

methods you can devise. Generally I use canvas oils for color, but often implement other mediums such as acrylics, or marking pens, sometimes using all of these on one gourd. When in a rush, I use Japan Dryer in the oils. But, this isn't good for art brushes and they'll need replaced or "over hauled" from time to time. Here again there are extra new brushes in my supplies, especially the fine detail brushes. After the paint is dry a finish coat of "fixitive" for canvas oils is sprayed over it carefully, because other types of finish can make oils run. This also was learned by experimentation after spraying "the wrong stuff" on a finished project and watching black paint run all over the other colors right on down to my elbow. While still in shock I grabbed a rag and wiped the whole thing off and began again, through evil thoughts and grumblings

Gourd crafting has been one of the most interesting and rewarding art forms I've tried. It's quite involved, when starting with a sprouting seed in March and with luck attaining a finished product a year later in March for the Indiana Gourd Show, . or the Kentucky Gourd Show in May, .summer and autumn Craft Fairs, .State Fair in August, and the Ohio Gourd Show in October, etc.

Pick up a wood burner and try it. I think this hobby will stay with me for many gourd moons.