

DIG ART!

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY
IN THE GARDEN



Natural Fibers & Dyes: Seed Jewelry Making

Overview Humans have decorated their bodies with the beauty of natural jewelry for thousands of years. Most botanical jewelry is made from seeds that are drilled and strung into necklaces and bracelets. In Central America, necklaces are still made from beans, corn, acorns, and a common grass seed called Job's tears.

Job's tears are easy to grow and make an attractive annual in summer gardens. They are probably the oldest beads known, dating back to at least 2000 BC. The seed is shaped like a teardrop. Legend has it that no one shed more tears than the biblical Job, and so this is the name by which it is most widely known. When dried, the seed has a hard outer shell, but a very soft inside. It also has a tiny natural hole, which makes it perfect as a bead for stringing jewelry.

Objectives Students will:

- create natural seed jewelry using Job's tears seeds harvested from their garden.

Time 2 hours

Materials

- Job's tears or other seeds that can be used as jewelry beads
- string or dental floss
- scissors
- color wood stains for dyeing seeds (optional)
- small yogurt containers or cups for wood stain (optional)
- tweezers for dipping seeds in wood stain or small paint brushes to paint stain on (optional)
- awl to clear out the natural hole in the seed (used in bookbinding and other paper crafts, available at most craft stores)
- sewing needle - big enough so that it can accommodate dental floss and can easily pass through the hole in the seed

Instructions

1. To harvest Job's tears seeds with your students, pick them from the garden when they are still somewhat firm and green. After picking they will continue to change color. Please note: In the northeast, harvest would take place around late summer or early fall. This plant has similar needs to corn, with respect to growing conditions and timing.
2. Place them on a flat surface so they can dry and harden over the course of a few weeks. Use your own judgment for determining when they are dry, since the timing will vary with each seed—some will be ready sooner than others.

3. For students that would like to dye their seeds different colors, they can dip them into different colors of wood stain, and then set them out on a tray to dry. Be sure to follow all safety precautions on the wood stain containers.
4. To prepare the seeds for use as beads in jewelry, the reed on which the seed grows must first be removed, so that a string or wire can pass through the hole. To do this, students will use an awl to clear out the natural hole in the seed.
5. For durable, pliable necklaces that will not become brittle with time, ordinary dental floss works better than nylon fishing line.
6. To facilitate the stringing process, a sewing needle threaded with dental floss can be inserted through each bead.



Photo of Job's tears seeds harvested, dried, and nearly ready for jewelry making. You can see the natural hole that runs down the center of the seed. Clear this with an awl for easy stringing.