

DIG ART!

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY
IN THE GARDEN



Gourd Crafting: Make a Shekere Shaker

Overview For those with a green thumb as well as a love for music, what could be more satisfying than growing your own musical instruments? Gourds have natural resonating chambers that make them easy to turn into musical instruments such as drums, shakers, koras, and sitars. Experiment in making gourd instruments of all shapes and sizes and from cultures around the globe. And if you put them all together you'll have yourself a global gourd band!

The Yoruba people of Nigeria added natural beads and shells to netting, which they draped over a gourd to create a music shaker called the *shekere* (shay-ka-ray). When the gourd is shaken or slapped, the beads strike the gourd shell and make a rhythmic sound. The shekere is now a popular instrument in many countries and music traditions around the world.

Objectives Students will:

- make a shekere shaker from a gourd
- experiment in making different instruments using the resonating chamber of a gourd



Time

- allow white shellac to dry overnight
- 3 hours for crafting

Materials

- gourds with good-sized handles
- round drill
- 75 ft of waxed linen string or #15 seine cord for each gourd
- scissors
- leather awl
- 100 beads for each gourd (made of glass, plastic, wood, natural seed pods, or shells)
- white shellac (available at local hardware or art/craft store)
- paint brush (for applying shellac)
- handsaw



Instructions

1. Cut an inch off the top of the gourd where the stem is. Remove the inside seeds and pulp. Seal the inside with white shellac, using a paint brush to brush it on. Be sure you are working in a well ventilated area and dispose of materials safely. Let it dry overnight.
2. Braid a loose collar of string around the neck of the gourd (the top). Make a second braided string to go around the bottom of the gourd.
3. To attach the strings to the collar, fold each string in half. Take the closed end (formed at the halfway point) and place it underneath the collar. Thread the two loose ends through the loop and tighten to form a slip-knot.
4. Tie a "loop" knot right below it to secure it (form the shape of a "6", bring the ends back through hole, and tighten). Continue this process with all the strings and place them around the collar at equal distances apart. For a 4-inch round gourd, this would work out to about 16 strands of string that are $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart and each 48 inches long.
5. When the strings are in position, tighten the loop knots to hold them in place.
6. Thread a bead onto one of the strings. Thread another bead on the neighboring string. Push the beads to the top towards the neck, and tie off loosely with a loop knot. Continue this process horizontally around the circle and finish the first row completely before starting on the second.
7. When the net reaches the bottom of the gourd, tie each set of double strings to the collar with a loop knot (more than one if needed).
8. When finished and secure, burn the ends off below the knot. Tighten or loosen the top or bottom collar to adjust the tension of the shaker.

Resources

Books

Shekere: The Story of a Gourd by Marta Gonzalez

Making Gourd Musical Instruments by Ginger Summit