



*Dedicated to my mother, who not only
inspired but believed in me every step of
the way. You were and will always be
my greatest delight!!!*

Before there was

“gourdening”...





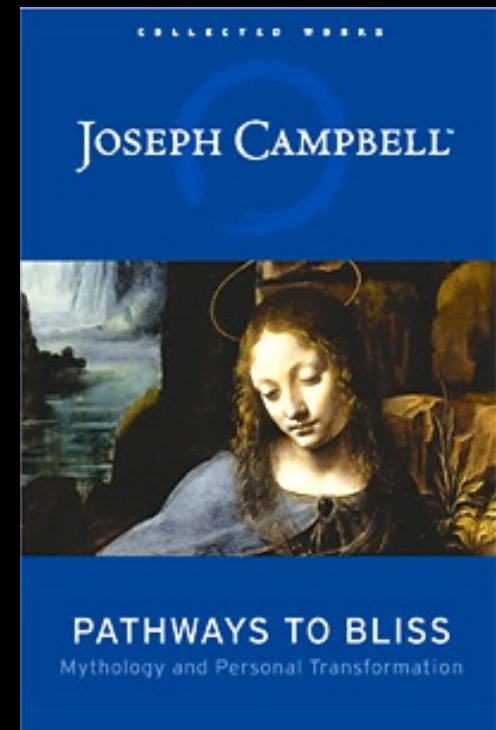
While recuperating from the rope swing incident that slightly dislocated my hip – and reading *Pathways to Bliss*...

I heard a voice say...

“Let there be gourd light!”

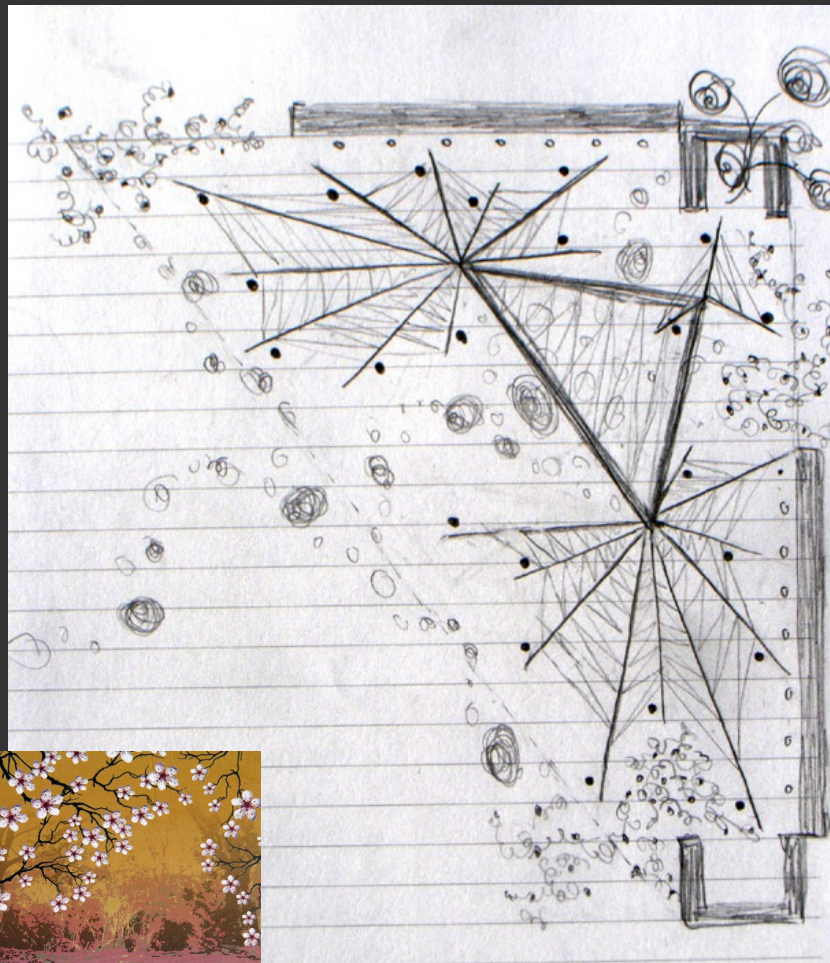
Well, to be more exact...

“I really need some new lamp shades!”

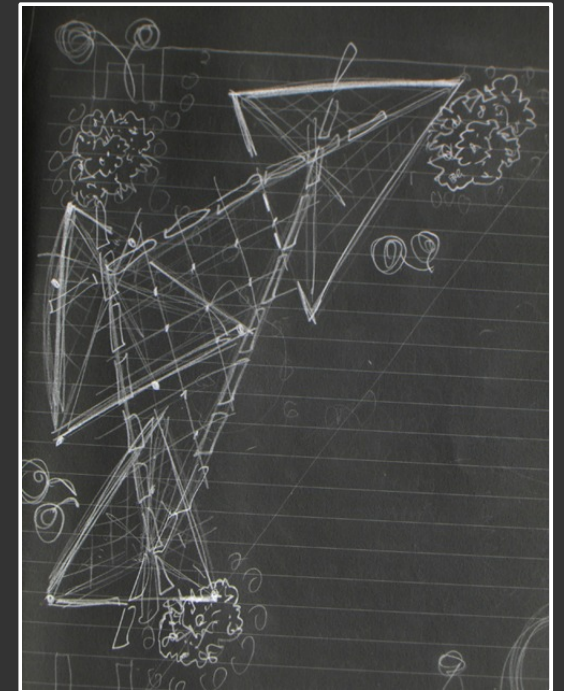


All are actual photos of the project except for those otherwise noted

All lamps shown on
this page were created by a
talented artist in Turkey



After doing some research online,
I realized that I wasn't the first to dream
up a gourd lamp shade.



The Vision

"You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one!"





I selected the best looking seeds and clipped the little chips off their shoulders to encourage germination. I then laid the seeds on moist paper towels inside plastic baggies in order to retain moisture.



Indoor Starts

My son's snake terrarium made a perfect incubator!

Google Image

I cut out the bottoms out of milk jugs and positioned them inside the terrarium to increase ventilation, positioned a heating pad under the terrarium atop a fire resistant pad; hung two grow lights underneath my art table and slid the terrarium underneath; and placed the sprout bags, covered by a towel, on top of the grow lights.

Chosen Varieties:

Purple Martins, Giant Bushels,
Long Handled Dippers,
Giant & Miniature Bottles



I nestled the seedling containers inside of the terrarium and provided 8-12 hours of grow light a day, daily watering, and a weekly misting of fungicide. After 6 weeks of incubation, I moved the seedlings out onto the back porch for 7 days to “**harden off**”.



A new plot takes A LOT of work: we tilled, then weeded, then tilled, then weeded again, then sifted rocks, then tilled, sifted, and weeded again... and again... and again!



Prep Plot

Compost Tea



Thanks for giving me
so much shit Dale! :)

I watered the pits daily for about a week to help the contents within filter down and produce micro-nutrient rich dirt for the gourd seedlings.

I also used “**compost tea**” = water seasoned with apple cider Vinegar (to increase acidity), a couple of clumps of manure/straw, extra radish, and marigold plants, steeped in the sun for 3-7 days.

After preparing the soil, I dug 28 pits - approximately 1 ½' by 1 ½' - and filled each pit with 2 scoops (8”) of organic fertilizer. The fertilizer consisted of mostly composted cow manure mixed with straw. The 'icing on the cake' consisted of table scraps, old mulch from flower beds, leaves, and grass clippings. I covered the newly dug pits with approx 4” of original top soil from our yard and sprinkled **Diatomaceous Earth** on top.



I was throwing grass clumps out of the garden absent mindedly when I looked back and saw Tessa Mae doing acrobatic leaps through the air to catch them. She seemed to think that we were gardening solely for her amusement and before it was over, she had mud caked all over her face and dripping from her little snout. It was quite a spectacle!

Thanks for your help Babble!



Time to Transplant

After the seedlings hardened off, I transplanted them into the micro nutrient rich pits and built mounds up around them to help aerate their shallow root systems.

At night, I covered the seedlings with the tops of the cut out milk jugs to keep hungry pests away.

I also sprinkled cinnamon at the base of each plant to help ward off “**damping down disease**” (seedlings mysteriously fall over and die).



ANT INVASION:

Filled nest entrances with **Boric Acid**



Google Images

My sandy Virginia soil was overrun with ants of all kinds - including red, biting ones - OUCH! I couldn't figure out if they were hurting the gourd seedlings or not, so I did a little research.

Some species of ants “farm” Aphids; that is the ants protect aphids from other predators so that they can eat the honeydew that aphids naturally produce. They **actually “milk” the aphids** with their antennae as shown in the picture above.

Lesson: where there are ants, there may be Aphids... and Aphids can devastate a cucurbit crop.



Irrigation & Mulch

Gourds need a lot of water – **approximately 3" a week** – and prefer a regular watering schedule. However, gourds do not like their leaves to stay wet, as they are particularly vulnerable to water-borne diseases. Thus, a low-to-the-ground watering system is preferable.

I connected two 50 ft soaker hoses and realized there wasn't enough water pressure to push through that much of the porous hose.

I had to resort to hooking the watering hose to each 50 ft soaker hose separately, which worked better.

Lesson learned: **Use a drip system** to conserve water, time and prevent unnecessary headaches.

The hoses gave me a lot of kink for the artistic shape of the garden!!!



Three inches of hardwood mulch atop the walkway areas kept the weeds out, increased soil acidity, and added spectacular contrast.

Straw kept the shallow root systems aerated and provided a soft nest/landing for the fruits.

Structural Support



Thanks so much for
providing all of the
Bamboo Raz!

Time for power tools! I had to get acquainted with a circular saw to cut my Bamboo to the appropriate lengths. I then installed the supports according to design.

Jute twine worked well to weave the intricate lattice work around the Bamboo poles... a little too carefully for Raz's practical sensibilities! ;)



And God said, “**let there be hail**”... TWICE! Although one of the storms blew the biggest teepee over, fortunately none of the hardy little seedlings were in the way.

AND... pushing the bamboo poles into the ground was much easier when the soil was wet from the storm!



Asiatic Lilly



Beautiful Borders

I collected most of my prized river rocks from underneath a one-lane bridge near my Dad's Church in Milborro. The vibrant colors of these ancient pieces of earth were breathtaking... literally!

I purchased a bag of small river rock to create the intricate borders of the garden. To my delight, these borders naturally took the shape of Blue Herons, which frequented our little bird sanctuary.



•Ian and I spent hours splashing around under the bridge... “ooing” and “ahhing” when we spotted a particularly astounding stone!

Thanks Babsterob!



Companion Planting



Aster



Marigold



Early Corn



Radishes (above and below)

All of these companion plants naturally helped to defend against pests such as Cucumber Beetles, Squash Bugs, Vine Borers, Thrips, and White Flies.

I also planted Nasturtiums, Fennel, Lavender, Citronella Geranium, and Catnip, though they aren't pictured; the *Early Corn* helped defend against **Anthraco**se.

The Cucumber Trap

Those bothersome little Cucumber buggers never even touched these sacrificial cucumbers. BLAST, plan foiled!!! However we did get some very nice Diva Cucumbers out of the botched trap crop!



Diva Cucumbers



And God said "let there be..."



Aphids,

Bad but Beautiful Villains



Stink Bugs,



Japanese Beetles,



And...

#1 Enemy, Cucumber Beetles...

by the thousands!!!"



Hoppers



Parasitic Wasp



Praying Mantis



Lady Bug



Centipede

and Heroes too!



Garden Spider



Assassin Bug

I also used Pyrethrin, Diatomaceous Earth, compost traps laced with Sevin Dust, Neem Oil, and Dr. Bronner's Peppermint Soap.



Oh no, not an
Earthquake...



One of my Healthy Fruits

Another first-time grower's quandary:

Blossom End Rot

Just Joshing!

It wasn't the earthquake...



Photo from Google Images

Enchanted by proliferating foliage and ghostly evening blooms, I was aghast to realize that the female blooms were aborting their fruits left and right!

Baffled by their rebellion, I raced to research and soon discovered "Blossom End Rot" (pictured above), which is caused by a **calcium deficiency** in the soil. Fortunately, I was able to find a foliar spray, which seemed to solve the problem.

Now the directions claimed that one treatment would do the trick, but I had a hunch I would need to supplement more. So I purchased some bone meal and planned to spray again later in the season. Too late, I waited too long and several of my largest gourds cracked up!!!

Indigenous Species



Indian Paint Berry: Nature's dye!

Who knows what'll pop up in your backyard if you quit mowing it!
This is truly a win-win... considering we have a raggedy ole push mower!!!



Milk Thistle: Everywhere!



Unidentified Little Darling



Morning Glory:

It's treacherous cousin, the Four O'clock, lures Japanese Beetles into its tasty bloom -- only to poison them. I'm definitely planting some next Spring, for Ian and I were accosted by a reckless fleet of Beetles in June!

On the other hand, those little wild flowers I'm so smitten with, "**over-winter**" many types of plant diseases. "Leaning out for love", my once strong and sturdy Sunflowers became seriously infected with a disease. I had no idea which one it was or how to treat it. So, I researched which diseases are common to both species and... voila!



It was...



Alternarian Blight

My Infected Gourd Plants (above and below)

But that wasn't the worst of it. To my horror, Hurricane Irene's maniacal winds swept millions of tiny spores upon her windy wings and blew them damn near everywhere. I thought the garden was ruined.

Fortunately, there just happens to be a very simple, inexpensive cure for such dastardly diseases: **Baking Soda**! Not only is it a preventative, it's a miracle cure!



The Results ?



A vibrant, healthy, garden of gorgeous!



Mysteriously, the garden and I came to reflect one another in some strange way. For it seemed that when I was doing well, it too thrived! Conversely, the garden seemed to manifest any stressful events in my life via some kind of pestilence or disease. This symbiotic relationship frustrated, amused, and delighted me all at the same time!



I planted 28 gourd plants and harvested approximately 50 large hybrid gourds and 30 miniature ones! This was a great success, especially for a first crop! A heart felt thanks to my dear friends and family!



In case you're wondering: Yes, the gourds are supposed to look that way. As they cure, mold covers the epidermis and fluid is expelled. After the fruits dry out completely, they're ready to clean & craft.



Many of the gourds weighed over 25 lbs on the vine. This big Bushel gourd commandeered my camp chair for several months.



The Harvest!



Lamps?

The cured, dried, and cleaned gourds pictured here are not my own. My gourds won't be completely dry and ready to craft for another 3-6 months.

I recently purchased those shown at the Virginia Gourd Festival, where I met the most delightful gourd artists, and growers, who were happy to share their secrets.

One jolly gourd grower explained that he'd been "bitten" several years ago and "it had only gotten worse!" I have to admit, there is something very special about these ancient, earthly vessels!



For the past several months, I've been collecting quality lamps from second hand stores. Now that I have a nice collection, I'll begin designing, crafting, and retrofitting the gourd shades onto the lamps.

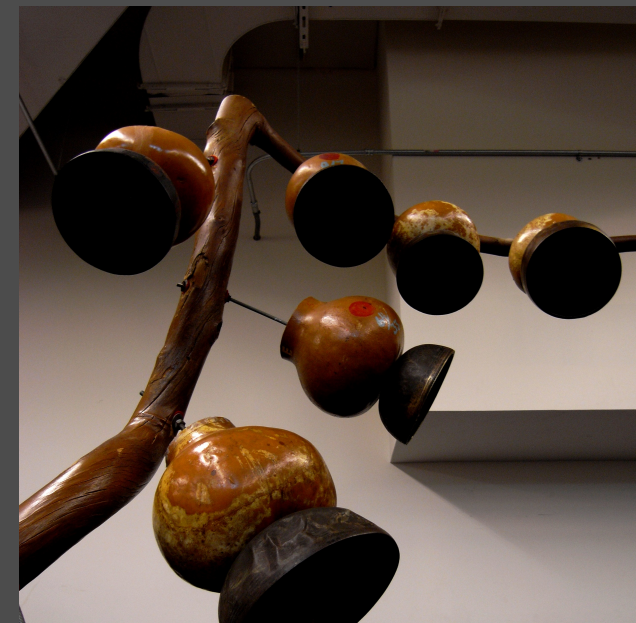
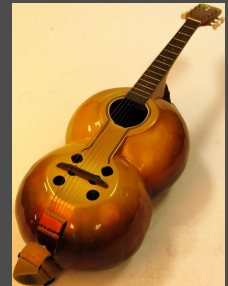
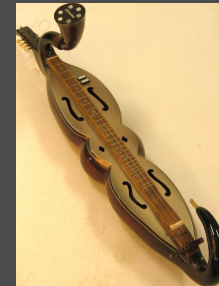
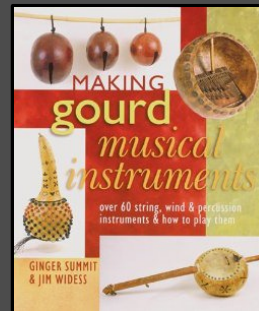


These second-hand lamps averaged about \$5 a piece. My own artisan lamps will range from \$100 to \$500 depending on the individual detail and craftsmanship.

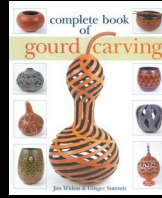


Percussive Possibilities

“see the light”, and “hear the music”?



Tools & Supplies



Gourds are an extremely versatile canvas, for one can apply almost any art medium to their cured shell. Fortunately, I studied fine art in college and I have a lot of supplies left!

Miniature Jigsaw
Drill w/ Extension
& Various Attachments
Dremel Tool w/ Bits
Wood Burner w/ Tips
Files and Sand Paper
Wood Carving Tools
Shoe Polish & Varnish
Sand Paper & Wax
Propane Heater
Safety Equipment

Like father – a fine wood craftsman – like daughter!

Thanks for all your help Jake!

Growing up, this picture hung on my bedroom wall just above the mantle-place. In *Pathways to Bliss*, Joseph Campbell states that, “The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the heartbeat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature.” I admit that I didn't consciously do that. My grandmother was a gardener and she hung the picture.



the Fairy Gourd Mother

The dirt in between the little girl's toes resonates with Estes spell-binding audio book *Women Who Run with The Wolves*. She insists that “you have to get down and dirty”. Well, I took her storytelling advice and discovered my bliss – plant-whispering I guess you could call it.

All grown up – yet still growing in so many ways – I still speak to that little girl in the picture... whispering secrets only a Fairy Gourd Mother knows. Once I've soothed and comforted her, I get right back to work putting the pieces of a social enterprise together:

Sea Billow Scribes is a mission-driven marketing company and Sanctuary is a faith-based healing garden that will serve battered/abused women who are seeking to grow healthy new beliefs, boundaries and relationship skills. Please read the Executive Summary to learn more.

Photo Gallery





















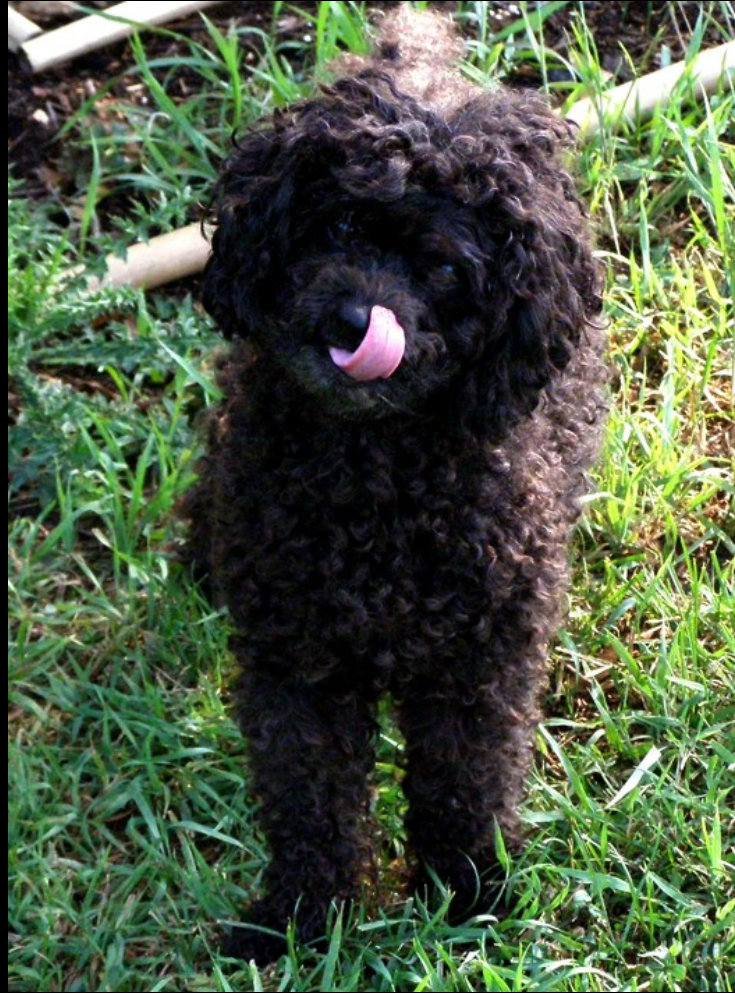
“To crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow. For when does a berry break upon the tongue as sweetly as when one longs to taste it, and when is the taste refracted into so many hues and savors of ripeness and earth, and when do our senses know anything so utterly as when we lack it?”



And here again is a foreshadowing--the world will be made whole. For to wish for a hand on one's hair is all but to feel it. So, whatever we may lose, very craving gives it back to us again. Though we dream and hardly know it, longing, like an angel, fosters us, smooths our hair, and brings us wild strawberries.”

Marilynnne Robinson--Housekeeping

Tha wittle ole, wittle ole, wittle ole, wittle ole, WITTLE OLE...



Tessa Mae