

# Did You Grow Any Tools?

by Kris Hart

September 18 2022 7:15 AM



LITCHFIELD - Some people grow a garden simply for its beauty. Some people grow a garden to produce food. But have you ever grown tools in your garden? There are some plants out there that can provide you with tools rather than just a pretty flower to enjoy or a bite to eat.

For example, you can grow luffa sponges in your garden? That's right! Luffas are actually a gourd. The plants get huge and grow wild at the end of the season. They produce 10" gourds that you allow to dry on the vine. The fibers inside form the luffa sponge. Once the gourds are dry, peel the skin off and allow the sponge inside to dry completely. You can then shake the seeds out and rinse the gourd. Once the gourd is clean, you can use it as a great shower luffa or kitchen scrubby. They have natural antimicrobial properties preventing them from stinking and molding. I cut one luffa up into three pieces and used those three sponges all year long to wash dishes before they finally wore out. They never got stinky or slimy. 10/10 would recommend! (Also check out Dipper Gourds and Birdhouse Gourds.)

I know many of you out there are growing sunflowers. Have you ever thought to save your stalks? After your flower head is gone and your seeds collected, allow your plant some time to die and then cut the stalk down with some loppers. You may have to trim the top off if your flower head curled it. Once you have your felled stalk, remove all of the leaves and allow the stalk to dry out completely in a shed or garage. I left mine over the winter and by spring they were ready to use. Once they are fully dried, they make excellent support poles and use them how you would use bamboo poles. I have had some sunflower poles that I used for several years in my garden.

The third and final plant I have to share is Stinging Nettle. This is a plant that grows wild around here and many of us tend to keep away from it as it is known as fire/itch weed. Even though the leaves do cause skin irritation, many people choose to cultivate it for a handful of reasons. It's a pretty useful plant as it can be used as food and medicine. It makes a great aphid trap as ladybird beetles love to lay their eggs on it. Because ladybugs eat aphids, this will keep the aphid population down in that area. Nettles are a great compost jump starter too. It gears up the decomposition cycle and helps speed the process along while adding rich nutrients to your compost. As an added bonus, nettle stalks are a great source of fibers. These fibers can be used to make paper, twine and a burlap-like fabric.

Do you know of any other tools you can grow in your garden? Please share your ideas, experiences, and tips on my Instagram or Facebook page @BottomViewFarmIL, and go get your hands dirty!

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*This story originally printed in the September issue of The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine. Read more at <http://www.thebuzzmonthly.com>*