



The Garden ~ Nature's Artbox

Making Natural Dyes From Plants

Did you know that a great source for natural dyes can be found right in your own backyard! Roots, nuts and flowers are just a few common natural ways to get many colors. Yellow, orange, blue, red, green, brown and grey are available. Go ahead, experiment!

Gathering plant material for dyeing: Blossoms should be in full bloom, berries ripe and nuts mature. Remember, never gather more than 2/3 of a stand of anything in the wild when gathering plant stuff for dying.

To make the dye solution: Chop plant material into small pieces and place in a pot. Double the amount of water to plant material. Bring to a boil, then simmer for about an hour. Strain. Now you can add your fabric to be dyed. For a stronger shade, allow material to soak in the dye overnight.

Getting the fabric ready for the dye bath: You will have to soak the fabric in a color fixative before the dye process. This will make the color set in the fabric.

Color Fixatives:

Salt Fixative (for berry dyes): 1/2 cup salt to 8 cups cold water

Plant Fixatives (for plant dyes): 4 parts cold water to 1 part vinegar

Add fabric to the fixative and simmer for an hour. Rinse the material and squeeze out excess. Rinse in cool water until water runs clear.

Dye Bath: Place wet fabric in dye bath. Simmer together until desired color is obtained. The color of the fabric will be lighter when its dry. Also note that all dyed fabric should be laundered in cold water and separately.

Muslin, silk, cotton and wool work best for natural dyes and the lighter the fabric in color, the better. White or pastel colors work the best.

NOTE: It's best to use an old large pot as your dye vessel. Wear rubber gloves to handle the fabric that has been dyed, the dye can stain your hands. It's also important to note, some plant dyes may be toxic, check with the Poison Control Center if unsure.

Shades Of Orange

- Bloodroot will give a good orange to reddish orange color
- Sassafras (leaves)
- Onion skin
- Lichen (gold)
- Carrot - (roots) orange
- Lilac (twigs) - yellow/orange
- Barberry (mahonia sp.) yellow orange (with alum) very strong & permanent. Any part of the plant will work.
- Giant Coreopsis (Coreopsis gigantea) Yields bright permanent orange with alum.
- Turmeric dyed cloth will turn orange or red if it is dipped in lye.
- Pomagrante – with alum anywhere from orange to khaki green.
- Butternut - (seed husks) – orange

Shades of Brown

- Wild plum root will give a reddish or rusty brown.
- Oak bark will give a tan or oak color.
- Sumac (leaves)
- Dandelion (roots) brown
- Broom - (bark) yellow/brown
- Walnut (hulls) (deep brown)(wear gloves)
- Tea Bags (light brown)
- White Birch - (inner bark) - brown
- Juniper Berries
- Fennel - (flowers, leaves) - yellow/brown
- Coffee Grinds
- Acorns (boiled)
- Hollyhock (petals)
- Colorado Fir - (bark) tan shade
- Yellow dock (produces shades of brown on wool)

- Beetroot (Dark Brown With FeSO₄)
- Red Leaf Buds (of many maple trees)- red-brown color when dried. Found on branches before new leaves appear only present during early spring and throughout fall.
- Amur Maple (Acer Ginnala) - black, blue, brown from dried leaves.
- Ivy - (twigs) - yellow/brown

Shades of Pink

- Strawberries
- Cherries
- Raspberries (red)
- Roses and Lavender, with a little mint and some lemon juice to activate the alkaloids can make both a brilliant pink dye and a very tasty pink lemonade.
- Lichens - A pink, brown, or wine colored dye can be produced from a lichen known as British soldiers.
- Camilla -It's a nice pink-magenta. With lemon and salt.
- Grand Fir -(bark) pink

Shades Of Blue - Purple

- Red cabbage
- Woad (first year leaves). Woad gives a pale to mid blue colour depending on the type of fabric and the amount of woad used.
- Mulberries (royal purple)
- Elderberries (lavender)
- Saffron - (petals) blue/green
- Grapes (purple)
- Blueberries
- Cornflower - (petals) blue dye with alum, water
- Cherry (roots)

- Blackberry (fruit) strong purple
- Hyacinth - (flowers) - blue
- Japanese indigo (deep blue)
- Red Cedar Root (purple)
- Raspberry -(fruit) purple/blue
- Red Maple Tree (purple)(inner bark)
- Nearly Black Iris - (dark bluish purple) alum mordant
- Dogwood - (fruit) greenish-blue
- Oregon Grape -(fruit) blue/purple

Red leaves will give a reddish brown color I use salt to set the dye.

Shades of Red

- Sumac (fruit) (light red)
- Dandelion (root)
- Beets (deep red)
- Crab Apple - (bark) - red/yellow
- Rose (hips)
- Chokecherries
- Madder
- Hibiscus Flowers (dried)
- Japanese Yew - (heartwood) - brown dye
- Wild ripe Blackberries
- Brazilwood
- St. John's Wort - (whole plant) soaked in alcohol – red

Shades of Red - Purple

- Pokeweed (berries)
- Hibiscus (flowers)(dark red or purple ones) make a red-purple dye.
- Daylilies (old blooms)
- Safflower - (flowers, soaked in alcohol) - red
- Logwood (is a good purple but you have to watch it as it dyes quick when the pot is fresh. Also it exhausts fast. We use alum to mordant and using iron can give you logwood gray.)
- Huckleberry gives a good lavender color and I have used it not only for a dye but also for ink.

Shades Of Gray - Black

- Iris (roots)
- Sumac (leaves) (Black)
- Carob pod (boiled) will give a gray to cotton
- Oak galls - makes a good black dye.
- Sawthorn Oak - (seed cups) – black

Shades Of Green

- Artemisia species provide a range of greens from baby's breath to nettle green.
- Artichokes
- Tea Tree - (flowers) green/black
- Spinach (leaves)
- Sorrel (roots) - dark green
- Foxglove - (flowers) apple green

- Lilac - (flowers) - green

- Camellia - (pink, red petals) - green
- Snapdragon - (flowers) - green
- Black-Eyed Susans
- Grass (yellow green)
- Pigsweed (entire plant) yellow green
- Red Pine (needles) green
- Nettle
- Broom - (stem) green
- Larkspur - green - alum
- Plantain Roots
- White Ash - (bark) - yellow
- Purple Milkweed - (flowers & leaves) - green
- Barberry root (wool was dyed a greenish bronze-gold)
- Red onion (skin) (a medium green, lighter than forest green)
- Yarrow - (flowers) yellow & green shades
- Mulga Acacia - (seed pods) - green
- Peach - (leaves) yellow/green
- Coneflower (flowers) - green

Shades Of Yellow/Wheat

- Saffron (stigmas) - yellow
- Safflower (flowers, soaked in water) - yellow
- Syrian Rue (glows under black light)
- Red Clover (whole blossom, leaves and stem); alum mordant; Gold.

- Yellow cone flower (whole flower head); chrome mordant; Brass to Greeney-Brass.
- Onion (skins)
- Alfalfa (seeds) - yellow
- Marigold (blossoms)
- Willow (leaves)
- Queen Anne's Lace
- Heather - (plant) - yellow
- St. John's Wort - (flowers & leaves) - gold/yellow
- Burdock
- Celery (leaves)
- Golden Rod (flowers)
- Sumac (bark) - The inner pith of Sumac branches can produce a super bright yellow color.
- Weld (bright yellow)
- Cameleon plant (golden)
- Mimosa - (flowers) yellow
- Dandelion flower
- Osage Orange also known as Bois d'arc or hedgeapple (heartwood, inner bark, wood, shavings or sawdust) (pale yellow)
- Daffodil flower heads (after they have died); alum mordant
- Hickory leaves (yellow) if plenty of leaves are boiled and salt added.
- Tea (ecru color)
- White mulberry tree (bark) Cream color onto white or off-white wool. Alum mordant.
- Paprika (shade of pale yellow - light orange)

- Beetroot (yellow) (alum & $K_2Cr_2O_7$)
- Turmeric (spice) --bright yellow
- Oxallis - the one with the yellow flowers. Use the flower heads, some stem ok. It is nearly fluorescent yellow, and quite colorfast on alum mordanted wool.
- Dahlia Flowers (Red, yellow, orange flowers) make a lovely yellow to orange dye for wool.
- Mulga Acacia -(flowers) - yellow
- Sunflowers - (flowers) – yellow