

HOW TO: NATURAL DYEING



THIS GUIDE GIVES YOU AN INTRODUCTION ON HOW TO USE PLANTS, FRUITS, TREES AND VEGETABLES TO CREATE STUNNING NATURAL DYES FOR A RANGE OF ITEMS.

TYPES OF DYES

There are two main types of dyes:

- **Non- Mordant (substantive dyes)** Here the colour goes directly onto the wool / fabric with no preliminary preparation.
- **Mordant Dyes (adjective dyes)** The fibre to be dyed has to receive some preparation before it can absorb the colour; this process is called mordanting. The mordant is mixed with water, then the fibres are soaked in this mixture prior to dyeing.

Four main mordants are used:

1. **Alum** - (Potassium Aluminate Sulphate) the most commonly used.
2. **Tin** – used mainly when bright shades of red and yellow are wanted for wool and silk, not suitable for linen and cotton.
3. **Chrome** - Bichromate of Potash generally used.
4. **Iron** - Ferrous Sulphate or Copperas. Tends to darken and dull colours.

If your dyeing is just for fun - you don't need to use a mordant - it just means the colour will wash out!



PREPARATION OF THE DYE-BATH

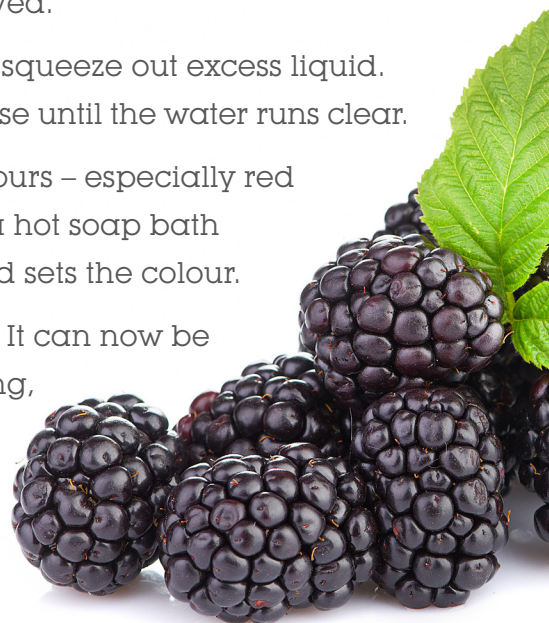
- Dyestuffs are generally put into cold water and heated slowly.
- Big pieces should be broken up first or soaked before heat is applied.
- Powders must be fully dissolved.
- Large items like twigs or bark should be removed before yarn is added.
- Heat till color is released into the bath, then allow to cool slightly.



DYEING WOOL

Wool is easier to dye than cotton or linen as the fibres are softer and easier to dye. It must be first washed to remove fat and dirt, then rinsed until it runs clear. It can be mordanted whilst still wet. Ensure that it is stirred gently in the dyestuff so that it does not felt up. It is worth remembering that the dye is stronger and more vivid when the dyestuff is freshly picked and that the colour of the wool is darker whilst it is wet than when it is dried.

- Mordant the wool as required and submerge it in the dyebath.
- Leave wool in dyebath until desired shade achieved.
- Remove and squeeze out excess liquid. Wash and rinse until the water runs clear.
- For some colours – especially red and yellow, a hot soap bath brightens and sets the colour.
- Dry the wool. It can now be used for felting, spinning, weaving – whatever!



NATURAL DYEING TABLE

Plant	Part	Mordant	Process – All for wool	Colour
Apple and Bird Cherry	Bark	Alum (100g)	Boil chopped up bark for 2 hours. Mordant wool and put in dye until required depth of colour achieved	Apple – dull yellow to deep gold
				Cherry – light chocolate
Blackberry	Berries	100g Alum, cream of tartar, 25g salt to 500g wool	Put crushed berries into cold water and boil. Put in mordanted wool	Blue / grey
		Alum only		Brown / grey
Elder	Leaves	Alum	500g dyestuff to 500g wool	Green
	Berries	Alum and salt		Blue / lilac
		Alum		Violet
	Bark	Iron		Black
Onion skins (easy but not very fast)	Outer skins only	Alum	Boil for 2 hours, add in wool and boil for 1 hour (smell goes when dried)	Dull yellow
Blackthorn (sloe)	Berries	none	Boil up 500g berries to 500g wool. *If washed after with soap	Rosy
		Alum	(Makes colour faster)	*Slate blue
	Bark	Alum	1kg bark to 500g wool	Red / brown
Walnut	Ripe shells and husks	none	Boil husks for 30 mins or more. Cool and put in wool. Boil until desired colour obtained	Brown
Bilberry	Berries	none	500g well bruised berries to 500g wool	Blueish
	Berries mixed with nut galls			Dark brown

The table above shows some of the natural materials used in the dyeing process, amounts, mordants, as well as the end colour.