

Dyeing



Dyeing with natural materials can be a very rewarding experience. It is an ancient art kept alive by some very persistent folk. Learning to dye with plants is an option open to everyone. Dye plant grow wild, giving one a ready supply when you are ready to try your hand at this craft.



Dyeing Equipment

2 enamel or stainless steel pots (5 gallon pots are a good choice as you can dye 1 pound of yarn in this size)

One large wooden spoon or stick to stir with

rubber gloves

soft water (this is very important. the hardness of the water will affect the color yielded)

thermometer

note: When I need iron for a mordant I use a 20 gallon cast iron cauldron I picked up at a flea market for 20 bucks



General Instructions



One day before dyeing:

1. Prepare the wool. Divide wool into skeins of no more than 4 ounces each. Tie loosely in 2 or 3 figure eights. Make sure the yarn is clean and without any debris or oil.
2. Soak clean yarn in water for at least 1/2 hour. Leave in pot or place in a plastic bag till you are ready to use.



Mordanting the Yarn

If using alum, tin, or, blue vitrol, mordant prior to dyeing

If using chrome or iron, mordant immediately prior to dyeing



Mordant amounts:

For an alum mordant use 4 ounces of alum, 1 ounce of cream of tartar, 4 gallons of water, 1 pound clean yard. Dissolve alum and cream of tartar in 2 cupfulls of water. Add dissolved mixture to the 4 gallons of water. Immerse the wet yarn in the mixture and heat gradually. Stir often. Simmer gently for about 1 hour. Cool. Remove the wool from the pot and squeeze out the excess liquid. Hang to dry out of sun. Store for future use.



For a tin mordant use 1/2 ounce of tin, 1/2 ounce of cream of tartar, 4 gallons of water, and 1 pound of yarn. Use the same procedure as you did for the alum but wash and rinse the yarn immediately afterward.



For a blue vitrol mordant use 1 ounce blue vitrol, 4 gallons water, 1 pound yarn. Follow the same procedure as used for the alum.



Prepare the plant stuffs that will be used for dyeing by chopping them coarsely. Crush them to release the any acids in the plant. Boil the to extract the dye. Let the mixture soak for at least two hours after the boiling process. Woody material and bark should be allowed to soak overnight.

Cover material with water and allow it to soak overnight.



On dyeing day:

Prepare the dye liquor by bring the dyestuff and the water it was soaked in to a boil. Simmer for about 1 hour. (note: fragile flower blossoms should be added to the dyebath with the yarn). Strain the liquid into a non-metal container and tie the plant material into a piece of cheesecloth. Add these to a pot to make 4 gallons of liquid.

Add mordanted wool to dyebath (note: wet any dry yarn before adding to dyebath.) Bring slowly to a boil. Simmer gently for about an hour, stirring occasionally. 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar can be added to the dyebath to improve the color. Tin added at the end of the dyeing process brightens the color, iron added towards the end will darken it. Make sure to remove the yarn before adding these chemicals to the dyebath. Cool the yarn in the dyebath.

After the yarn has cooled, wash the yarn with a mild soap. Rinse well and dry in a cool, airy place out of the sunlight.



Tips

Always use natural fibers when dyeing with natural dyes.

Gather all your materials before starting.

Experiment with different mordants.



Recipes for Natural Dyes

Light Brown - 1/2 bushel white birch bark, no mordant

Dark Yellow to Tan - 2/4 pound ground coffee, chrome mordant

Violet - 2 gallons berries, chrome mordant, 1 tablespoon salt during when boiling the berries.

Gold - 3 gallons goldenrod flowers, chrome mordant

Red - 1/2 pound madder, alum mordant

Burnt orange - 3 gallon yellow onion skins, alum mordant

Lemon yellow - 1/2 bushel weld, alum mordant

Gold - 1/2 bushel weld, chrome mordant



Look for more dyeing information in the coming days!



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