

# Natural Dyeing with Oxalis Flowers on Cotton....

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Natural Dye with Oxalis Flowers on Cotton Lint

by

Janis Saunders

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It is definitely spring in my garden when the yellow oxalis (also known as sour grass or wood sorrel) begins to bloom. Of course, right now that is about the only thing in my the garden, but that's another tale. Those flowers are calling to me to do some natural dyeing. I seem to do a little each year having done quite a bit of experimenting about twenty years ago. Now I enjoy taking the oxalis and making a one-pot dye bath.

This year I decided to dye some cotton from the garden of a friend. I will tell you how I did it but beware, it isn't very scientific at all! These quantities are an educated guess but the soft golden yellow color is nice so I consider it a success.

1/2 C. of oxalis (*oxalis corniculata*) flowers, no stems

3/8 oz. cotton

1 T. alum

1 T. washing soda

tap water to cover

stainless steel pot

I put the flowers in the tap water, brought it to a boil and then simmered for 30 minutes. I then removed the flowers.

I added the alum to the clear bright yellow bath and it became a bit cloudy. Then I sprinkled some of the washing soda into the bath, turned around to check my notes and when I turned back found I had missed most of a surprising chemical reaction. The dye bath had turned into a pumpkin colored foam!!\* The foam was so stiff it held a + inch diameter, 8 inch long dowel straight up in the center of the pot. The foam actually extended over the edge of the pot by almost + inch and took at least ten minutes to go down, there was no scent or obvious gas given off, but the next time I will do this outside. Once it got below the edge of the pot I stirred it to encourage it to dissipate and eventually added the rest of the washing soda.

The cotton had been scoured earlier by simmering it for 40 minutes with 1 tablespoon of washing soda. It was rinsed well, added to the pumpkin colored bath, brought to a boil and simmered for 2 hours (probably a little long but it didn't seem to hurt it).

I rinsed the cotton and tried to tease it apart to dry. I should have tried harder because after it was dry it was all matted up and took quite a bit of time to tease into a fluffy mass.

The information I had was for pre-mordanted cotton so I think that is why there was no mention of foam in the article!

The articles were from Joan Ruane's Cotton Newsletter, issues 2 and 6. You can get her newsletter (full of information about cotton) and catalog by writing her at Southwest Corner, PO Box 418, Bisbee, AZ 85603 or call her at 800-879-8412, the newsletter is \$5.00 per year for

four issues, a real bargain. \*I have since learned that the acid from the oxalis reacted with the washing soda to make the foam.

Janis

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Bio:

Janis has been weaving seriously for sixteen years. For eight years she wove cloth for a local designer. She weaves blankets and scarves using complex patterns on a AVL computodobby and also enjoys inkle weaving, tablet weaving, Kumihimo, spinning, braids and knots, as well as natural dyeing. Janis teaches intermediate weaving at the Crafts Center, University of California at San Diego. As editor/membership for TWIST:

Tablet Weaver's International Studies & Techniques she has the opportunity to correspond with weavers all over the world.

Her website, The Weaver's Hand, features pages on Kumihimo, Peter Collingwood, TWIST's homepage and gallery and WARP: Weave a Real Peace, and our two local guilds as well as links to other interesting sites. The

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