

## A Natural Dyeing Experience

- by *Birthe Pedersen*

Last autumn I finally found the wonder-mushroom called *Hapalopilus nidulans*. I found only one fruiting body, and carefully dried it up for later use.

My book on dyeing with mushrooms says that it will dye violet, purple and lilac colors, depending on the mordant used. On non-mordanted yarn it should give a nice violet, and that was what I decided I wanted to try!



I followed the description in my book, according to which I should boil the pulverized mushroom with a little ammonia water to free the dye-stuff. The color turned deep lilac immediately like it was supposed to.

Next step was to strain the substance, add water and a little bit of soda lye to make the dyebath alkaline. In neutral and acid solutions the color would end up brown, it said, but it didn't say just how alkaline it should be.

I put in the soda lye and measured the pH-value to be about 9 or 10, then added 110 grams of my handspun, silver-gray yarn (not mordanted) and turned on the heat for an hour as usual.



As time went by I got more and more thrilled with joy, because the yarn didn't become violet, but rather blue! And a deep, beautiful, warm blue color it was! - Let me just note that in natural dyeing the blue color is *the* most desired color, and to my knowledge you can only get it from indigo.

Well, my mushroom-dyebook also tells about another mushroom (*Sarcodon imbricatum*) that under conditions that are extremely difficult to create, gives blue. But it smells! And the color you get if you're very lucky is not a very clear blue anyway. So no doubt that I was both very surprised and very happy to see this yarn turn

wonderfully blue before my eyes!

After washing and hanging out to dry the color still looked good - but! Something had happened to my nice soft handspun: When dry the yarn felt stiff, very brittle and had lost its elasticity and life. I had killed it!

My guess was that the dyebath was far too alkaline, and I decided to try with some more yarn in the same dyebath but with lower pH-value, as it looked as if the dyebath still had some color left in it.

This time I used some white store-bought yarn - I didn't want to risk ruining any more of my precious handspun..



I diluted the dyebath with water and also added some acetic acid to bring the pH-value down to 8. Then heated for an hour like before, and the

color came out a bit boring: A bluish grey, but on the other hand the yarn survived.

When (if) I find the mushroom *Hapalopilus nidulans* again this year I'll continue my experiments. Hopefully next time I'll be able to recreate that beautiful blue color without ruining the yarn. Any suggestions on what to try next will be highly appreciated and can be mailed to me at [pedjuhl@post6.tele.dk](mailto:pedjuhl@post6.tele.dk)

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