

NATURAL DYEING

Natural dyes may be animal, vegetable or mineral. These instructions refer to the dyes in our starter set, which are all vegetable dyes. And they refer to the dyeing of wool. Cotton, linen, silk and other fibers can be naturally dyed, but it is harder to do, and not suitable for first attempts.



Please also see our MORDANTING RIFF for more complete information about this process.

PREPARATION OF WOOL

It is important to remove dirt and grease completely before dyeing. Wash wool at least two times in warm, soapy water. Rinse till the water runs clear. Skeins should not be over-large, and should be tied in several places to prevent tangling. Ties should have tight knots and loose loops.

METHODS OF DYEING

There are three basic methods:

1. Mordant wool first, then add it to dye-bath.
2. Mordant and dye wool in the same dye-bath.
3. Dye wool first, than fix by mordanting.

We recommend pre-mordanting with alum, and using other color-modifying mordants as additives in the dye-pot. This yields sets of related colors. See MORDANTING RIFF.

AMOUNTS OF DYESTUFF REQUIRED

(To dye one pound of wool.)

Alkanet	1 – 4 oz
Brazilwood Chips	1 – 6 oz
Cochineal	1 – 5 oz
Cutch Extract	1 – 2 oz
Henna	3 – 8 oz
Madder Root	3 – 8 oz
Osage Orange Sawdust	3 – 8 oz
Logwood Extract	1/5– 1 oz

PREPARATION OF DYE-BATH

Dyestuffs are generally put into cold water and heated slowly. Big pieces should be broken up first. Some benefit from being soaked before heat is applied. Most dyestuffs need to be boiled to extract the color (madder should not be heated beyond a simmer; boiling releases brown dyes). Powders must be fully dissolved. Twigs or bark or other bits and pieces which may get snarled up in the yarn should be strained out before yarn is added. Heat till color is released into the bath, then allow to cool slightly.

Dye-pots must be non-reactive (enamel is good) if you want a clear color; iron or other metal pots will act as mordants and affect your results. And they must be large enough for the amount of wool to be dyed to spread out and move around freely, to avoid uneven dyeing. Four gallons of water to one pound of fiber is about right.

DYEING

Enter wet wool into a tepid bath. Heat slowly. Avoid abrupt temperatures changes throughout, to minimize shrinking. Rough stirring causes felting; be gentle. Dye until desired shade is reached, or bath is exhausted, remembering that colors are darker on wet wool than on dry. Let the bath cool, then lift wool out, carefully. Squeeze gently to remove excess dye. Rinse till there is no run-off, and allow to dry.

COLOR PROBABILITIES

	NO MORDANT	ALUM deepens	BLUE VITRIOL blues	COPPERAS saddens	TIN brightens
ALKANET	gray/blue	purple	brown/purple	purple/black	deep mauve
BRAZILWOOD	pink-yellow	salmon-rose	brown/salmon-rose	rosy brown/purple	pink rose
COCHINEAL	pink	crimson	dusty purple	gray/purple-black	red
CUTCH	rusty tan	rusty brown	brown	gray brown	rusty gold
HENNA	brown	brown	khaki/brown	dark brown	red brown
LOGWOOD	blue-brown	gray/brown/purple	gray/blue	purple/grey	dark purple
MADDER	pink tan	deep orange	dark tan	brown	orange
OSAGE	light yellow	green/yellow	light olive	olive	bright yellow