In the Kitchen: Dye Recipes

by Cathy Bullington with Michelle Cox

PROJECT PDF Download

Try one or more of the following recipes to begin your explorations with dyes from the kitchen. Before you begin, presoak the fibers in water for at least 1 hour.

Mordanting

Basic Alum and Tartaric Acid Mordant

10% WOG alum dissolved in 1 cup (.25 L) warm water (or 8 scant tsp per 1 lb fiber; 1 tsp alum weighs ± 0.64 g or 0.23 oz)
5% WOG cream of tartar dissolved in 1 cup (.25 L) warm water (4 scant tsp per 1 lb fiber)
4 gallons water per 1 lb fiber (15 L per 457 g)

- Add the alum mixture to the water in a large nonreactive stockpot. Add the cream of tartar mixture. Add the presoaked fibers and stir gently.
- Bring to a low simmer. Simmer for 30 minutes. Allow the fiber to cool to room temperature.
- Rinse and hang the fiber to dry or rinse and leave damp immediately before dyeing the fiber. Mordanted fiber may be stored in a cool, dry place until ready to dye.

Michelle Cox

Cathy Bullington

Tea Mordant

50% WOG tea (1 teabag weighs about 0.04 oz or 2 g and contains about 2 tsp dry tea); use 8 teabags per gallon of water
4 gallons water per 1 lb fiber (15 L per 457 g)

- Prepare the tea mordant by placing the teabags in the water and steeping for 1 hour. Squeeze the liquid from the teabags; strain the bath if using loose tea.
- Stir in presoaked fiber and soak overnight.
- Wash with a pH-neutral soap, rinse, and hang to dry or use immediately.

Tea/juice drink mixtures offer other possibilities for cold mordant/dyeing. Check the ingredients for tea or citric acid, which can help the dye process. Avoid sweetened drinks, because the sugar is hard to rinse out and makes the fiber sticky.

Notes: *Black tea will give the fiber a golden yellow color and green tea a paler yellow color. The color of a tea mordant will affect the color result obtained when dyeing with additional materials. Because of the yellow color, it is a good base for other yellows, oranges, or greens (in combination with blue dyes).*

Dyeing

General Directions

- Place the dyestuff into a nonreactive pot with enough water to cover. Bring the contents to a simmer over low heat for 30 minutes to an hour; too much heat can destroy or change the color.
- Allow the dyestuff to cool, then drain the liquid through a strainer and reserve the liquid. If small seeds or fibrous bits are floating in the water, pour the liquid through a coffee filter inside the strainer.
- Add the strained dye liquid to a large stockpot with enough water to cover the fiber and allow it to move freely. Add the presoaked fiber to the dyebath and stir.
- Bring to a simmer over low heat for 30 minutes. Allow the dyebath to cool to room temperature, remove the fiber, and rinse.
- Wash the fiber with a pH-neutral soap such as Ivory dishwashing liquid. Rinse well and hang to dry out of the sun.

Notes:

- *One canning jar will hold about 2 oz of dry onion skins.*
- *Different colors of onion skins will offer different colors; we used yellow and red onions and shallots. You may also mix colors of onion skins in one dyebath.*

Cathy Bullington

Onion Skins

50% WOG dried onion skins
Paper bag
Clothespin
Canning jar
1½ cups (.37 L) boiling water
Strainer
4 gallons water per 1 lb fiber (15 L per 457 g)

Joe Coca

- Save dry onion skins in a paper bag closed with a clothespin until you have enough for your dyebath. To extract the dye, pack dry onion skins into a canning jar.
- Pour boiling water over the onion skins to cover. Steep at least overnight; two days of steeping will create a stronger dye. (If the dye gets moldy before you are ready to use it, skim the mold off the top and place the canning jar in a simmering water bath for 30 minutes to kill off any remaining mold.)
- When ready to dye, strain the liquid from the onion skins, add enough water to cover presoaked fibers, and add the fiber. Simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Allow the dyebath to cool to room temperature or let sit overnight for stronger colors.
- Rinse and wash fiber with a pH-neutral soap such as Ivory dishwashing liquid. Hang to dry.

Berries, Fruits, and Vegetable Dyes

400% WOG fruit or vegetable material
1 tsp salt (for berries)
Strainer
Coffee filter
4 gallons water per 1 lb fiber (15 L per 457 g)

- Chop any large items into pieces no larger than 1" cubes. Add the pieces to a nonreactive pot and add water to cover. For berries, sprinkle 1 tsp salt over berries and stir.
- Bring to a simmer for 30 minutes. Allow to cool to room temperature and strain liquid into the dyepot. (Line the strainer with a coffee filter if there are small seeds or fibrous bits.) Add enough water to cover fiber, then add presoaked fiber and stir.
- Bring to a simmer and simmer for 30 minutes. Allow to cool to room temperature or let sit overnight for stronger colors. Be sure to stir occasionally and push fiber back down into dyebath.
- Rinse and wash fiber with a pH-neutral soap such as Ivory dishwashing liquid. Hang to dry.

Michelle Cox

Notes:

- *Fruits and vegetables may be used fresh or frozen.*
- *Different parts of a plant may yield different colors.*
- *Brighter colored fruits and vegetables do not always yield bright dyes. The chemical reaction from heating may change the color. Some dyestuffs may give better color using cold dyeing methods.*
- *Colors can sometimes be shifted by adding acidity (a 50/50 vinegar/water mixture) or alkalinity (1 tbsp washing soda in 1 cup water). Adding acidity to the red cabbage dyebath will turn it bluish.*
- *Most berries will yield bright colors, but the colors quickly fade with light and washing.*
- *Some plant parts are inedible—for example, rhubarb leaves are toxic. Rhubarb leaves can be used to make a mordant, but should never be used in your kitchen.*

Photos by Joe Coca.

Mushroom Dye

50% WOG dry mushrooms or 400% WOG fresh mushrooms (2 oz dry or 1 lb fresh mushrooms per 4 oz fiber)
1½ cups boiling water
A few drops ammonia
Canning jar
Strainer
Coffee filter

- Chop mushrooms if necessary to fit canning jar. Place mushrooms in the canning jar until two-thirds full. Pour 1 cup (.25 liters) boiling water over the mushrooms, then add more water to cover the mushrooms.
- If no color is steeping out, move to a well-ventilated area and add 2 or 3 drops of ammonia.

! Only use ammonia in a well-ventilated area and be sure to mark the container as "not for food" or "poison."

- Loosely place the lid on the container and let sit overnight or up to two days in a cool, dark place. You will need to let out the built-up gases as it steeps; when opening the container, cover with a towel and open away from you in case fumes and gases have built up.
- Strain the liquid, using a colander lined with a coffee filter to catch any small bits floating in the liquid.
- Add enough water to cover the fiber and stir. Add the presoaked fiber and stir. Bring to a simmer for 1 hour, then allow to cool.
- Wash the fiber with a pH neutral soap such as Ivory dishwashing liquid, rinse, and hang to dry.

Michelle Cox

Notes:

- *Be safe when using ammonia. Follow the safety guidelines on the bottle.*
- *Keep steeping mushrooms that are in a safe place away from children and pets.*
- *Simmer the dyebath in a well-ventilated area and do not use any pans you would use for cooking food.*

Joe Coca

Michelle Cox

Spice Dye

20–25% WOG spice in powder, seed, or petal form
1½ cups warm water
Canning jar
Strainer
Coffee filter

- Prepare a dyebath from ground spices by mixing the spices with warm water in a canning jar. (Be sure to mark the jar as "not for food.") Add the lid and shake to mix.
- Steep the ground spices in the water for a day or two, then strain the dye liquid through a colander lined with a coffee filter.
- Add the dye to enough water to cover the fiber and stir well. Add the presoaked fiber and stir. Bring to a simmer for 1 hour. Allow to cool.
- Wash the fiber with a pH neutral soap such as Ivory dishwashing liquid, rinse, and hang to dry.

Notes:

- *Spices in seed form may need to be crushed using a mortar and pestle to release color.*
- *Yarns and other loose fibers will require extra rinsing if powder from the spices has gotten into the dyebath.*
- *Some spice mixtures such as curry powder or Ras El Hanout (a Morrocan spice blend) will not dye evenly because they include different ingredients in one spice. If you do not stir or rinse well, you may have streaks on your fabric.*
- *Try shifting colors by adding acidity (50/50 vinegar/water mixture) or alkalinity (1 tbsp [15 mL] washing soda in 1 cup [.25 L] water). Adding alkalinity to yellow dyebaths may turn some reddish.*

Joe Coca

Saffron Dye

Saffron is a special kind of dye that needs different preparation.

12.5% WOG saffron
8" (20.5 cm) square of muslin
12" length of butcher twine
Large cup or bowl of cold water
Clothespin
Plastic gloves

- Place the saffron in the center of the muslin square. Fold up the edges of the muslin and twist it shut around the saffron. Tie tightly with the butcher twine and knot the string ends.
- Place the saffron bundle in cold water and use the clothespin to hold the string to the side of the cup or bowl. Steep for 1 hour. Wearing gloves, squeeze the dye out of the bundle.
- Pour the dye solution into a nonreactive pot and add water to cover the presoaked fiber. Add the fiber and stir. Do not heat; allow the fabric to rest in the dyebath for an hour.
- Wash the fiber with a pH neutral soap such as Ivory dishwashing liquid, rinse, and hang to dry.

Michelle Cox

Joe Coca

Notes:

- *Cellulose and protein fibers may absorb the dye slightly differently.*
- *The freshness and variety of the saffron may also change the results.*

