

# Solar Notes from the Road

From "Solar Dyeing: Cushing's Direct Dyes for Plant Fibers"  
JOAN S. RUANE

When teaching classes, I always learn new things and discover new tips. Necessity is the mother of invention! Here are a few things I've learned during my teaching travels about keeping solar dyeing easy.

1. To avoid scouring cotton in a pot of boiling water, place your cotton into the dye jar with the dye and salt solution, and give about two small squirts of Dawn on top of the cotton. Poke the fiber down into the solution with a large spoon. The detergent will scour the fiber well enough for the dye to penetrate the fiber.
2. In a workshop in Little Rock, Arkansas, we needed to heat-set the dyed fiber. We placed our dyed fiber into ziplock plastic bags, sealed them, and laid them in a parking lot. The warm sunshine on the asphalt created enough heat and steam to set the dye.
3. In the middle of a Tucson, Arizona, summer, I can simply hang the dyed sliver outside to heat-set the dye without steaming. This works if the outside temperature is over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.
4. When you finish painting your sliver, do not waste the dye. You can combine colors to create new ones or just pour the dye into a gallon jar with a little more salt and add fiber to it.
5. It is especially nice to dry sliver on a breezy day because it fluffs up, making it easier to spin.
6. Timing does not really matter with Cushing dye; it is very forgiving. Even if you forget and leave it in the jar overnight, no harm is done. The dye solution in the containers will last several days, so you can keep dyeing in the same jar until you exhaust all the dye and the water is clear.
7. If your fiber is immersed in the dye solution and the color is developing into a shade you do not like, you can always add another color. Just dissolve the new color in hot water with a dash of salt before adding it to the dye jar.

Photo by Joan Ruane

**Spin Off**  
e PATTERNS