Natural Dyeing: Experimenting with colour

Description

When I first stated natural dyeing I found it daunting & somewhat intimidating. There was so much to learn and remember however over time I have come to see the simplicity in a process that first felt overwhelming. Just like anything when you break it up into small sizes it becomes much easier to grasp. Bringing colour into your life through natural dyes might be easier than you think as there are endless supplies of natural dyes around us.

Swatches of Cotton, Linen and Velvet Silk dyed with Avocado stones

Once you start experimenting you will begin to see the potential of colour all around you. If you do not have a garden, local parks or neighbourhood gardens can be overflowing with possibilities. Starting in your kitchen look at what you put in the compost on a regular basis. Yellow and red onion skins, tea leaves and coffee grinds, cabbage, pomegranate rind, avocado stones and skins can all yield beautiful soft colours. Outside in the parks or countryside, fallen leaves, acorn, alder cones, nettles, dandelions, daffodils or dahlias are a great starting point.

Heavy weight linen dyed with avocado stones

Take a walk and look around you at the trees, plants or shrubs in your neighbourhood & consider experimenting with these. The wonderful thing about trees is that all the different parts can be used, the fallen bark, twigs, leaves, flowers or fruit. Living in Dublin we have lots of beautiful old Oak trees & Alder which grow by the river banks. When I lived in California there was an abundance of Eclyuptus trees, after strong winds, the ground would be covered with the leaves which yield the most beautiful rusty browns to soft pinks and dark reds.

Medium weight Linen dyed with “Cutch” from the heartwood of the Acacia tree

Just like with cooking and most processes there are many ways to approach this process, there is no one right way and that is part of the beauty of this craft. There are however only a few rules when following this process. The first thing to consider is that the cloth you will be dyeing must be cleaned thoroughly by a method known as scouring. Scouring is a process of removing any natural oils, waxes or residues from the cloth that may be leftover from the manufacturing process or if it’s an antique piece, accumulated over time. You want to remove as much coating from the fibre as possible in order for the cloth to take up the mordant & dye effectively & evenly.

Swatches of heavy weight linen dyed with Tea & Avocado stones

Often when people first start they skip this step and get uneven or weak results. To clean the fibres you can use dishwashing liquid or a scouring agent which can be purchased from dye suppliers. It is possible to purchase fabric that has been prepared for dye “PFD” or “RTD” ready to dye, which just needs to be rinsed prior to dyeing.

It was great to see all of your comments and questions in the last article and I would love to know what part of the world you are in & what trees, plants or flowers are most common in your areas?

CATEGORY

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2. TUTORIALS

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Author
kathryn-davey