

Mission: Raven Hill provides a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history & the arts.

Natural Dyes

Natural dyes is a fun activity for summer. Be sure you know the plants that you choose are safe (not poisonous) and that you have permission from parents or whomever to pick things. Start out with something simple. I am using coreopsis flowers, but you can also try leaves or bark or even fungi. There are lots of books that will tell you good dye plants. Whatever you decide to use, pick enough to fill a saucepan. Fill the saucepan half full of water and add the plant material, just as if you were cooking spinach. Let the plants simmer gently until the color is in the water and no longer in the plant material. Pour the water through a strainer. Throw the plant material away and keep the water. You can use wool, silk, cotton or linen yarn or material to dye. Prepare your yarn or material ahead of time with a mordant, to chemically bind the dye to the fibers. Add 1 part alum to 8 parts water; 1 part salt to 16 parts water or 1 part vinegar 4 parts water for a mordant. Simmer materials in mordant for about an hour. Leave the material wet. Place the mordanted material in your strained dyebath. Let it simmer or sit overnight to absorb all the color it can. Rinse and dry. Enjoy the colors. They are not always what you expect!! Below, clockwise from top is green—Norway maple leaves; brown—walnut hulls; orange—onion skins; gray—sumac berries; yellow—coreopsis flowers.



1 Collect pla



2 Use flowers or leaves



3 Boil plants in water



4 Strain out plants, save water, add mordant



5 Use yarn, shoelaces or other



6 Simmer in dye or let sit overnight



7 All naturally dyed