



## Exploration - Plant dyes



This little booklet does not pretend to teach the art of natural dyeing.

It's about taking a walk and opening yourself up to the possibilities, foraging for yellow - yes, foraging for a color! and dyeing a skein of wool that will remind you of the sweet days of summer, its light, its sounds and its smells.

You'll see, it's very simple!

### **Materials required**

For a 100 g skein of pre-mordanted wool (available from [bergeriedesetoiles.com](http://bergeriedesetoiles.com)):

- A saucepan of at least 4L
- A wooden spoon
- A kitchen thermometer
- A fairly fine sieve
- 100 g or more fresh plants (or onion peel, 25 g)
- A 30 cm piece of string
- pH-neutral wool soap

Note: the saucepan should be reserved for your experiments, and should not be used for cooking afterwards. Take a trip to the second-hand store, where you'll find pots and pans at friendly prices. It's also advisable not to use reactive materials like aluminum (or copper, cast iron), which can alter the color you get.

Felting: sudden changes in temperature, agitation or friction can cause wool fibers to aggregate, **irreversibly** transforming them into a compact material. Not practical for knitting (...but worth discovering!).

How much plant material should I use? In natural dyeing, we usually speak of "WOF", the *weight of fiber*. This is the weight of plant in relation to the weight of fiber to be dyed, expressed as a percentage. With fresh plants, we generally use a WOF of at least 100%, i.e. 100 g of plant for 100 g of wool. Increasing the WOF gives a more intense color. You can also dry your plants after chopping them to dye your wool later. They keep very well, preferably in a paper bag. The dye solution can be kept in a cool place for a few days.

There are many other variables that modulate the results, which you'll discover as you experiment. Witches and sorcerers for a day, to your pots!

### **Method for patient people (maximum color extraction, over two days)**

1. Start by coarsely chopping the plants
2. Fill the pan with cold tap water and put your plants in it.
3. Heat over medium heat until simmering (around 80-90°C) and maintain this temperature for an hour to extract the color. Cover and leave to cool overnight.
4. Tie the skein with the piece of string (not too tightly, so as not to block penetration of the solution!) and soak it in water at room temperature for at least 15 minutes, until the fiber is well saturated.
5. Strain the liquid in which the plants have infused overnight and return it to the pan. Compost the plants.

WARNING! Before proceeding, make sure that the color solution and the soaking water for your skein of wool are at the same temperature, as a difference of 10 degrees or more can cause your wool to felt.

6. Place the skein in the saucepan and heat over medium heat to 80-90°C. You may want to stir DELICATELY to make sure all the fibers are soaked. Maintain this temperature for one hour, then turn off the heat. Leave to cool.

Note: You can leave the wool in the liquid overnight, as the color will probably get more intense.

7. Rinse the wool in a container of room-temperature water and dry it out gently without wringing or rubbing (this too can cause felting!). You can put it in a towel and roll the towel tightly to absorb as much water as possible.

Note: it's always a good idea to wait a few days before washing wool with a little pH-neutral wool soap, but if you're impatient you can wash right away. Use water at room temperature (beware of sudden temperature variations).

Hang your skein up to dry.

### **Method for the impatient (one-day process, slightly less intense color)**

1. Start by coarsely chopping the plants
2. Fill the pan with cold tap water and place your plants in it.
3. Heat over medium heat until simmering (around 80-90°C) and maintain this temperature for an hour to extract the color. Cover and leave to cool.
4. Tie the skein with the piece of string (not too tightly, to avoid blocking the penetration of the solution!) and soak it in water at room temperature for at least 15 minutes, until the fiber is well saturated.
5. Sieve the liquid in which the plants have infused and return it to the pan. Compost the plants.

WARNING! Before continuing, make sure that the color solution and the soaking water for your skein of wool are at the same temperature, as a difference of 10 degrees or more can cause your wool to felt.

6. Place the skein in the saucepan and heat over medium heat to 80-90°C. You may want to stir DELIGHTFULLY to make sure all the fibers are soaked. Maintain this temperature for one hour, then turn off the heat. Leave to cool.
7. Rinse the wool in a container of room-temperature water and wring it out gently without wringing or rubbing (this too can cause felting!). You can put it in a towel and roll the towel tightly so that it absorbs as much water as possible.

Note: it's always a good idea to wait a few days to wash wool with a little pH-neutral wool soap, but if you're impatient you can wash it right away.

Hang your skein up to dry.



**Common native plants easy to find for various shades of yellow and soft green fairly resistant to washing and light.**



- Clockwise from top :*
- Onion skins
  - Goldenrod
  - Tansy
  - Birch leaves
  - Yarrow
  - St. John's wort