

Using Botanical Colors Liquid Natural Dyes

Please read our health and safety guidelines before using any of our dyes, mordants, fixers or auxiliaries.

What can I dye?

Our natural dyes will work on any natural fibre 'goods' - yarn, fabric, fibre, fleece etc. They will work on both animal or plant fibres. Natural/synthetic blends will still dye but the higher proportion of synthetic content the less satisfactory the results.

You will need:

- One or more dyestuffs (see below for quantities)
- For animal fibres: Alum - 5g-15g per 100g dry weight of goods (5g-10g on fleece, roving & finer fibres such as angora/alpaca and fleece. 10g-15g on yarns)
- For plant fibres: Aluminium acetate - 5g per 100g dry weight of goods
- pH neutral washing liquid
- Water
- Plastic bucket for soaking goods
- Large stainless steel or enamel pan, pyrex or microwaveable dish
- Gloves, dust mask, apron and plastic/newspapers to cover surfaces
- Measuring scales, measuring spoon and jug
- Stirring stick or spoon
- Access to a hob/hotplate/microwave/oven

Preparation & Mordanting

Mordanting prepares the fibres to bond with natural dyes. We recommend using aluminium potassium sulphate as a mordant for protein (animal) fibres and aluminum acetate for cellulose fibres and blends (including silk).

For 100g dry weight of fibre:

1. Make sure fibre is clean and not oily or greasy feeling. Wash with a mild soap and rinse thoroughly prior to mordanting if required.
2. Add 10g alum (protein fibres)/5g (1 tsp) aluminum acetate (cellulose fibres) to a small beaker of boiling water to dissolve. Once dissolved, put into dyepot and add enough room temp. water to a dye pot to allow fibres to move freely in the liquid.

Add fibres to dye pot. Stir gently while bringing the heat up to 45°C/100°F.

3. Hold at this temperature for 45 minutes rotating fibres occasionally.
4. Remove fibres from dye pot, drain and rinse briefly. You are now ready to start dyeing. You may mordant on one day and dye the next or mordant and dye in the same day. If you are mordanting in advance, store the mordanted fibre in a plastic bag in a cool place for up to one week. Fibre can also be dried and re-wetted by soaking in plain water until thoroughly wet (this can take between an hour and overnight depending on the fibre).

Amount Of Dye To Use – Cellulose & Protein Fibres

Note: 5% = 1 tsp/5ml per 100g dry weight of goods. 10% = 2 tsp/10ml per 100g dry weight of goods and so on.

Dye	Light Shade	Medium Shade	Dark Shade
Saxon Blue Indigo*	1-5%	10%	20%
Himalayan Rhubarb Liquid	1-2%	5%	10%
Madder Liquid	1-2%	5%	10%

**Saxon blue is not recommended on cellulose (plant) fibres*

Dye Procedure – Cellulose & Protein Fibres

1. Measure out desired amount of dye(s) (dyes can be blended to achieve new colours). Add to dye pot filled with enough water to allow fibres to move easily without excessive crowding. Stir pot so dye is evenly dispersed.
2. Add pre-wetted yarn, fabric or fibres to the pot. They should be wet but not dripping. Any natural fibre composition should dye successfully, however see note re: Saxon blue on cellulose fibres. Nylon will also dye but synthetics such as acrylic and polyester give disappointing results. A small amount of synthetic in a blend (up to 30%) will dye but will give paler results.
3. Heat pot to 30°C/90°F. Rotate fibres gently to avoid felting or tangles. Hold at this temperature for 30 minutes.
4. Bring heat up to 90°C/200°F and hold for 30-45 minutes. Dyebath should look very light or nearly clear (exhausted). You may let fibres cool in the dyebath until safe to handle. Rinse dyed fibres in warm water.
5. If the dyebath still contains a lot of dye, add 50 ml (approx. 3tbsp) white (distilled) vinegar and continue a low simmer for up to another 30 minutes, then let cool overnight in the dyebath. Rinse in cool water.

How do I rainbow dye my yarn/fibres?

For rainbow dyeing, prepare and mordant your goods as above. While they are still damp, lay the goods out on cling film, in a pan, or in a suitable dish. Make up your chosen dyestuffs in a jar or bottle by dissolving approximately 1 level tsp dye liquid in 50ml water. Using a paintbrush, syringe or pouring directly from the bottle, apply the dye to the fibres. Wrap the fibres completely in clingfilm or cover the dish/pan and either microwave in 1 min intervals for around 5-6 mins. Alternatively, steam/cook on the hob for 20 mins. Do not allow the fibres to dry out – add a little water if needed. Allow the fibres to cool, rinse and dry.

Notes & Troubleshooting

If the fibres seem to be bleeding excessive amounts of dye while you are rinsing, stop and let the freshly dyed fibres air dry completely. Once the fibres are dry, then rinse and air dry.