

Using Hue & Dye Natural Dyestuffs

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

What can I dye?

Our natural dyestuffs 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

You will also need:

- 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

Dyeing instructions

These instructions apply to most dyestuffs apart from indigo and woad (a separate leaflet for indigo and woad dyeing is available).

Dyestuff and dyebath preparation

1. For best results, prepare dyestuffs the day before by placing dyestuff in a pan, adding enough boiling water to easily cover dyestuffs then leaving to steep overnight. (For madder roots, pour boiling water over roots, leave for two minutes, strain the liquor into a bucket and repeat. Retain this liquor for a separate dyebath with golden orange-brown shades later).
2. The following day, top up with more water to make dyebath & simmer 20 mins. (Amount of water is not crucial but goods should be able to move freely). Remove dyestuffs from dyebath by straining through muslin or coffee filter paper. Retain dyestuffs to re-use for paler shades. Dyebath is now ready for use and should be used as soon as possible for best results.

Goods preparation and mordanting – protein (animal) fibres

1. Thoroughly wet goods by soaking in water with a squirt of washing liquid. Scour goods first if required to remove lanolin, waxes & processing finishes.

2. Prepare mordant bath by dissolving alum/aluminium acetate (see above for quantities) in a little boiling water then adding to a large pan/ microwaveable dish. Top up with enough water to enable goods to move around freely.
3. Once the goods are thoroughly wet, squeeze out excess water and place in mordant bath.
4. Slowly heat goods on hob, bringing to simmering point over 30-45 mins. Simmer (do not allow to boil) for a further 45 - 60 mins. Stir gently every 5 minutes or so. Alternatively, microwave goods on full power, 5 mins at a time, for 30 mins in total, stirring every 5 minutes.
5. Leave goods to cool in mordant bath. Once cooled, remove, rinse briefly in warm water & squeeze out excess water.
6. Add goods to dyebath. (Note: Goods can be wrapped in clingfilm or put in an airtight container for later. Alternatively allow to dry & re-wet when required).
7. To cook on the hob, bring dyebath to simmering point over 30-45 minutes, then keep the pot simmering (do not allow to boil) for 30 – 45 mins until the desired colour is achieved. Stir gently for even colour. Alternatively, cook the goods in the microwave on full power, 5 minutes at a time, for 25 minutes, stirring gently every 5 minutes.

Note: Madder is sensitive to heat and water pH, so heat slowly and test water pH. For reds, do not overheat and ensure pH 9 or higher. For oranges, pH should be mildly acidic, pH 6 or lower. Once the goods have reached the desired colour, remove from the heat as it may go orange with overcooking, eventually going brown.

8. After cooking, leave goods in dyebath to cool. This can be overnight (or even several days if you want stronger colours), but leave at least a couple of hours.
9. Once cool, lift goods from dyebath, squeezing out gently and allowing dye liquor to drip back into pan/dish. This can be re-used for paler shades or topped up with additional dyestuff.
10. Rinse goods thoroughly and allow to dry.

How much dyestuff do I need?

Some dyestuffs are stronger than others but as a general guide for 100g goods and a medium shade allow:

Cochineal 10g • Fustic 50g • Logwood purple 50g • Madder 100g • Walnut 100g