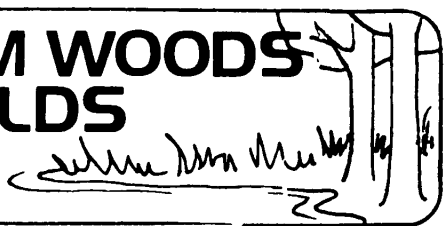


FROM WOODS & FIELDS



by Connie J. Magoffin

Color is appearing everywhere. My garden is pushing up through the earth and it's hues are already making their way into my imagination. We are all getting ready to test those plants we've never tried before and perhaps the following experiments that have been sent to me will encourage your adventuresome spirit this summer.

Karen Meyerhof sent 18 samples of various yarns and fibers she had used in experiments with a *Parmelia* lichen and with brazilwood. The *Parmelias* were collected in mid-September from rocks on the north shore of Lake Superior. She simmered them off and on for a week and before straining out the lichens she added 3 samples of yarn to test the color. A bulky soft twist wool turned out a rich deep warm brown (gorgeous), a fine silk turned a light brown and a cotton did almost nothing. These had been simmered periodically over 3 days and 2 nights. With great anticipation, Karen strained out the lichens and added some more yarn, only to end up with a rather ordinary gold and dull green-gold. I have been similarly disappointed after achieving beautiful samples. We forget that in order to obtain the same results the proportions of dye material and fiber must be constant. There is usually a very large proportion of dyestuff used when sampling is done. Also, I would probably leave the lichens in the dyebath while dyeing, confining them to a nylon stocking to prevent contact with the yarn. Karen did overdye her lichen-dyed yarn with brazilwood and achieved almost the same rich brown as her sample.

Her brazilwood test resulted in colors on a variety of wools ranging from rose-reds with alum and tin, to several elegant wine-reds with copper, and finally a gray-purple with iron. An unmordanted silk yarn also turned a wine-red. The brazilwood was from Staw Into Gold and she used 8 oz. for 2½ pounds of fiber and she added it was "... still going strong." Karen simmered the brazilwood approximately 4 hours to extract the dye; dyeing times ranged from 1½ to 2½ hours. Her samples made me want to order some brazilwood immediately. While the reds are different from those that cochineal gives, the colors are beautiful and the cost considerably less expensive.

A mimosa tree that Vergie McWilliams of Dyer, Indiana, had transplanted in 1975 to her yard was the subject of the first completed dyeplant record sheet I have received. (If you have any dyeplants you wish to record growth information on for

yourself and for our Arboretum project, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to me at 3248 Colfax Ave. So., Mpls, MN 55408 and I will send you some record sheets.) Vergie sent 12 yarn samples dyed with 2-year-old dried leaves and stems from her mimosa tree (*Albizia julibrissin*, also known as silktree). Although the tree grows wild in the southeastern U.S., she struggles to keep hers alive and it was nearly killed by frost in 1976. She achieved a wide range of colors based on a recipe using a large pail of leave boiled one hour to obtain dye for 2 pounds of fiber. The leaves were soaked overnight in soft water and some hard water was added to the dyebath which was simmered for 1½ hours. Following are her results:

1. Yarn dyed 45 minutes, 1st dyebath: alum—lt. dull yellow; chrome—rich, deep gold; tin—bright gold.

2. Yarn dyed 45 minutes, 2nd dyebath: tin on white wool—slightly clearer yellow than above with alum.

To part of the dyebaths Vergie tried adding some hydrated lime.

3. 1½ quarts dye, ¼ teaspoon hydrated lime, ½ teaspoon blue vitriol, yarn simmered 45 minutes, 1st dyeing: alum—lt. olive; chrome—bronze; tin—yellow green.

4. 3 quarts dye, ½ teaspoon hydrated lime, 1 teaspoon copperas, yarn dyed 45 minutes, 1st dyeing: alum—deep avocado; chrome—bronze brown; tin—medium warm brown.

5. Mixed leftover dye from No. 2 and 3: alum—grayed lt. green.

It is always exciting for me to see samples of dyed yarn, especially if it is a dye material I've never used before. Keep those samples and record sheets coming in, folks!

Some time ago Pam Brickson introduced herself to me at the Weavers Guild. We chatted about natural dyeing and she shared a dyeing technique she had used when living in the Southwest, however it may have some application for us this summer. Pam used the sun as a source of heat for dyeing, especially when her time was limited, as she could leave it for hours or even days without watching. The yarn and dye steep in a large restaurant-sized glass jar in the sun. To help out the sun the jar may be wrapped in black paper, it may be then placed in a foil-lined box, glass may be placed over the top and it may also be tipped toward the sun and moved to follow the sun if you have the time. The yarn is then left steeping until the desired color is achieved. Pam warned, however, depending on the dyes used, you may end up bleaching your color out again if the yarn is left in too long.

I hope these dyeing experiences that Karen, Vergie and Pam have shared with us will motivate you to try something new.



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