Simmer the chopped green hulls along with your fiber in water until the desired color is achieved, perhaps leaving the fiber in the dye over-night. Nut hulls, along with most barks, are some of the few dyestuffs that need to be simmered for longer periods of time than the usual hour or so. If they are being used from a dried state, the hulls should be soaked from a minimum of overnight to as long as several days before being used for dyeing. It is also probably best to simmer them for some time before adding the fiber. One great advantage to dyeing with walnuts is that no mordant is necessary to obtain a fast color. Slight variations of browns can be achieved, however, with the use of different mordants.

How many hulls should be used? I have used as little as the chopped fresh green hull from one walnut to obtain a rich, chocolate brown on one ounce of fleece. They were simmered together for two hours and allowed to cool together overnight before rinsing. If dried hulls are used a much larger quantity will be needed to reach a dark brown. I’ve usually found that fresh hulls give a richer and more vibrant color and old hulls tend to give a duller brown.

My experience with hulls that have been on the ground for any length of time has been poor. I am assuming that exposure to rain or snow has caused the water soluble pigments that we are seeking for dyeing to be leached out.

In addition to walnut hulls, fresh walnut leaves have often given me as beautiful a brown as the hulls. I’ve had no luck trying to dry walnut leaves for storage purposes. And, yes, I have used butternuts with the best brown, also, coming from the fresh hulls.

Walnuts are an indispensable source of brown dye for the natural dyer. If you don’t have a friend with a walnut tree, you had better start talking to the squirrels!