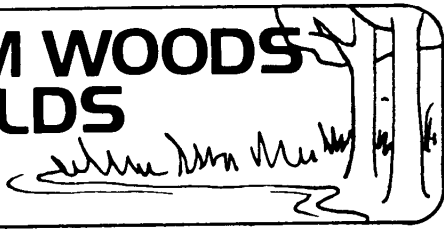


FROM WOODS & FIELDS



by Connie Magoffin

It is far too easy to discuss and experiment with natural dyes to think only in terms of dyeing wool yarn. However, the possibilities of the application of natural dyeing reach far beyond. In this column I will not attempt to tell you the "how-tos" nor do I intend that I know all the applications. But it is time for me at least to list some of the possibilities.

Let's consider an alternative to dyeing yarn. It is possible to dye wool not only in yarn form but also in fleece and cloth form. One advantage to dyeing fleece is that any unevenness in color can be carded out. Another advantage is that colors can be blended together during carding to achieve heathers and secondary or tertiary colors that might be difficult to obtain in dyeing. Cloth can be dyed solid colors or, several other techniques which will be discussed later, can be used in dyeing cloth. Remember, too, that many different types of yarns can be dyed for use in embroidery, weaving, crocheting, knitting, macramé, etc.

Now let's consider an alternative to wool. Almost any natural material can be dyed. In addition to the four basic natural fibers (wool, cotton, linen and silk), I have tried many other materials such as raffia, sisal, cane, paper, feathers, angora rabbit, mohair, alpaca, and dog hair. I haven't been successful

in dyeing leather, however, a man that I talked to at a demonstration was going to try it on the leather jackets he makes. I also think grasses and other materials for basketry would be fun to try. In addition to these natural materials, Lotus Stack discovered that some kinds of nylon can be dyed with natural dyes.

Now that you are familiar with the different materials and forms available, it is time to explore other uses and techniques for natural dyes. ikat, tie-dyeing, and batik are age-old natural dye techniques that could absorb contemporary application. Top-dyeing can take on an even more interesting aspect when used with these techniques. Last spring Lotus Stack and I gave an elementary demonstration on warp painting using natural dyes. Much further experimentation with this exciting technique is warranted. A University of Minnesota art student called me some time ago and wanted information on using natural dyes with an air brush. This year my family had a great time dyeing Easter eggs with onion skins, tea, etc. We made lovely patterns on the eggs using ferns and clover, a Swiss tradition according to Rosemary Olmsted.

There are other uses for natural pigments besides dyeing. Wood was often stained by rubbing with dyes; one example is walnut hulls. Tapa cloth was traditionally dyed or stained with natural dyes. Inks and cosmetics were, of course, originally made with natural pigments. History is permeated with terrific stories involving the importance of natural dyes in our ancestors' lives. Botany and chemistry are two of the sciences I am trying to penetrate. As you can see there are endless avenues of pursuit.

Several of these areas are explored in the classes at the Guild, Natural Dyes I and II. Others are ones I've tried at home and yet others I've only read about or dreamed of trying. I hope I have inspired you to explore some exciting new areas of natural dyeing.



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