https://talu.earth

TUTORIAL

Transform your clothes

WITH COLOUR FROM PLANTS

from seed

talú

to second skin

Materials you'll need:

- Your hot plate, stove top or hob: aka a source of heat
- Kitchen scales
- An aluminium or stainless steel pot*
- A wooden or stainless steel spoon. You can also use aluminium or stainless steel tongs*
- A sieve or colander*
- A cheesecloth or piece of muslin
- Another pot or bowl*
- Mild, biodegradable detergent. You can also use washing-up liquid.
- Soybeans, soy flour or soy milk with the least possible additives (unflavoured!) You could also try out any other kind of milk (including cow), provided it is high in protein and doesn't have any additives or flavourings.
- Ferrous sulphate, also called sulphate of iron. You can get it in garden centres. Be sure to keep it away from small children or pets! Ingestion can be lethal for them.
- Gum Arabic. Available in art supplies stores
- Brushes
- Spare jars
- Something to protect the surface you're working on (cardboard or plastic). If you're painting a garment like a t-shirt, you'll need to place a piece of cardboard or plastic in between both layers of the garment to prevent the paint from bleeding through.
- Your selected garment to upcycle! In the world of natural dyeing, there are two classifications for fibres: cellulose and protein. Cellulose fibres are those that come from plants (e.g. cotton, linen, hemp, bamboo, viscose, tencel, etc.). Protein fibres come from animals (e.g. wool, silk, alpaca, mohair, etc.) Synthetic fibres like polyester, acrylic or elastane can't be dyed with natural dyes. If your garment is made from cellulose fibres, all techniques in this tutorial will work well. If your garment is made from protein fibres, it will dye beautifully, but the first technique of this tutorial (painting with soy milk) won't give you as clear results as it would if you were using cellulose.

* I normally recommend you only use designated kitchen utensils for natural dyeing. However, for this tutorial, you can use your regular cooking pot and utensils, since you won't be heating up any metallic salts. If you *do* get serious about natural dyeing down the line (which I'm rooting for!), you'll have to get designated utensils that won't be used for cooking anymore.

- Your selected dyestuff. **You will need at least the same weight as your garment**. So, if the piece of clothing you'll be dyeing weighs 250g, you'll need at least 250g of dyestuff. You can probably get away with using half the weight of your fibre (e.g. 125g of dyestuff for a 250g garment), but you'll get a lighter colour. These are my recommended colour sources for this tutorial:
  - Avocado skins and stones for dusty pink – make sure you remove all the green flesh!
  - Red and yellow onion skins for a bronze yellow – you can get away with using at least one-third of the weight of your garment (so, 83g of onion skins if you're dyeing a 250g piece of clothing)
  - Pomegranate peels for a bright yellow
  - Eucalyptus leaves can give colours ranging from yellow to orange or even brick red, depending on the variety
  - Spent black tea or coffee grounds for browns
  - Oak leaves for browns

First of all...

1. Weight your garment when it's dry and write this measurement down.
2. Wash your garment in the highest heat setting it'll take, using plenty of mild, biodegradable detergent or washing-up liquid. Cellulose fibres can tolerate really high heat. If you're using protein fibres, wash them by hand with warm water and plenty of soap or in the "delicate" "hand wash" or "wool" setting of your washing machine, at no more than 40°C and with a very low spin speed. Avoid fabric softeners or any additives, as these might adhere to the fabric and prevent it from absorbing the dye.
3. Dry your garment.

Make your soy milk paint

1. If you're using soybeans or soy flour, leave them to soak overnight with enough water to cover them. Only use as many as you'll need since soy milk doesn't keep well.
2. The next day, blend really well (or mix if using soy flour) and strain through a piece of cheesecloth or muslin.
3. Repeat this step 1-2 more times, combining the strained soy milk to achieve a very protein-rich milk.

PLEASE NOTE: this homemade soy milk is not for drinking!

4. Once you have your soy milk, or if you're using store-bought milk, combine 10 parts of milk to 1 part of gum Arabic to make your paint. These measurements don't need to be too exact; what you want is a high-protein paint that won't bleed in the fabric. You can do some tests in a scrap piece of fabric that is similar to the garment you want to paint, to make sure the paint has the right consistency.

5. Once you're happy with the consistency of your soy milk paint, place your garment in a stable and protected surface, using cardboard or plastic in between layers of fabric and get creative! Paint any pattern or design you want into your garment – the sky's the limit!

6. Let the paint dry away from direct sunlight and, if you can, let it sit for a week so the soy can cure into the fibre and you can achieve the best colour possible.

You can store your soy milk paint inside an airtight jar in the fridge, but make sure to use it up within a few days, because it won't keep for too long!

Prepare your dye bath

After a week has passed, you can start preparing your dye bath:

1. Place your dyestuff in a pot and add enough water to cover it.

2. Place your pot on your hot plate, stove top or hob and bring the heat up to a low simmer without boiling, for at least 1 hour. After this, you can start dyeing, but I recommend leaving your dye materials soaking in the pot overnight with the lid on, in order to extract as much colour as possible while the dye cools down to room temperature.

3. Strain your dyestuff and discard it in your compost bin, keeping only the liquid: this is your dye!

PRO TIP: If you're looking for the best colour possible and have the patience for it, I recommend you repeat these steps two more times, especially for tougher dyestuff like avocados or pomegranates. So: cover with water, simmer, strain, cover with water again and repeat twice. Then, simply combine all three dye baths into one super colour-rich solution. Avocado skins and stones really benefit from repeated simmering to release their dusty pink colour – they like to take their time!

Dye, rinse & dry!

1. For even dye results, your garment must be thoroughly wet before dyeing. Give it a quick rinse under the tap or in a bowl of water.

2. Pour your dye liquid back into the pot and add your wet garment. Add more water if needed, so that the piece of clothing is completely covered and can move around freely.

3. Bring the pot to a low simmer and stir often so that the dye is absorbed evenly. Make sure the pot doesn't reach boiling point, especially if you're dyeing protein fibres, as wool can felt with very high heat. A nice indication of the optimal heat is having lots of steam, but no bubbles.

4. Once an hour has passed since the water reached a low simmering point, turn the heat off and let the garment cool down in the pot. If possible, leave it to soak overnight with the lid on.

5. Rinse your garment under running water until the water runs clear and leave it to dry away from direct sunlight.

Bear in mind that the colour of the wet garment will be much darker than the final colour, once the fabric is rinsed and dry.

Iron paint

1. In one of your spare jars, put around ¼ tsp of ferrous sulphate crystals. A little iron really goes a long way!

2. Add gum Arabic and some water until you get a paint-like consistency.

3. Use your iron paint to paint a pattern or design over your already-dyed fabric. The iron in the paint will react with the dye and darken or "sadden" the colour! Feel free to play around with different amounts of ferrous sulphate for darker or lighter colours. It's always a good idea to increase the amount in little increments! If your paint is too thick, add more water. If it's too runny and starts bleeding too much, add gum Arabic.

4. When you're done painting, let the paint dry completely before rinsing off the gum Arabic and excess iron. Make sure you rinse your fabric really well because iron residue can be corrosive to fibres and start damaging them prematurely!

5. Leave to dry away from direct sunlight and you're done!

Washing & aftercare

- To wash your garment, do it by hand, using cold water and mild, neutral soap.
- You can also use your washing machine on a delicate or hand wash cycle, at a temperature of no more than 40°C.
  Do NOT tumble dry!
- Hang to dry away from direct sunlight. Lay woollen and knit garments to dry horizontally so they don't lose their shape.
- The more your textile is exposed to friction and sunlight, the quicker it'll start to fade out: **take care of it so that the colour lasts longer!**
- Remember you can always re-dye your piece of clothing or overdye it to create new effects or colours!

What's next?

- **Check out my blog** for more natural dyeing and slow fashion tips and tricks!
- I recommend checking out **Rebecca Desnos**'s work; she uses a lot of soy milk in her natural dyeing work.
- **Liz Spencer, The Dogwood Dyer**, is also an excellent person to follow.
- If you're ready to go deeper into the world of natural dyeing and strengthen your relationship with the Land around you, **check out my upcoming online and in-person natural dyeing workshops!**

I'M READY TO LEARN MORE!

- And if you're overwhelmed by the process and would prefer to have an expert do it for you, don't worry! **I offer a custom natural dyeing service to revamp your clothes with the power of plants.**

CHECK IT OUT!

from seed

Talú

to second skin

I'D LOVE TO SEE YOUR
NATURALLY DYED CREATIONS!
PLEASE TAG @TALU.EARTH
ON INSTAGRAM ♡