

## Using plants as dyes

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Before there was Rit Dye, plants and other items were used to make dyes so fabric could be colored from the white of cotton. Natural fabrics such as cottons, silk, wool, and linens are the best to use. Synthetic blends don't take dyes well.

These plants have natural dyes in them:

**Orange:** carrots, gold lichen, onion skins

**Brown:** dandelion roots, oak bark, walnut hulls, tea, coffee, acorns

**Pink:** Berries, cherries, red and pink roses, avocado skins and seeds (really!!)

**Blue:** indigo, red cabbage, elderberries, red mulberries, blueberries, purple grapes, dogwood bark

**Red-brown:** pomegranates, beets, bamboo, hibiscus (reddish color flowers), bloodroot

**Grey-black:** Blackberries, walnut hulls, iris root

**Red-purple:** red sumac berries, basil leaves, daylilies, pokeweed berries, huckleberries

**Green:** artichokes, sorrel roots, spinach, peppermint leaves, snapdragons, lilac, grass, nettles, plantain, peach leaves

**Yellow:** bay leaves, marigolds, sunflower petals, St. John's Wort, dandelion flowers, paprika, turmeric, celery leaves, lilac twigs, Queen Anne's Lace roots, mahonia roots, barberry roots, yellowroot roots, yellow dock roots.

Make sure all plant material is **MATURE, FRESH** and not dried. Chop the plant material as small as possible. In some cases, like the yellow dock roots, you may have to smash with a hammer. If the plant is at its peak but you won't need for a while, you can prepare, label, date and freeze it until needed.

Now to begin with our dyeing process:

Before you start your dye, process wash your fabric but do not dry as it is best to start with wet fabric. First you will prepare the "fixative" to help your fabric absorb the natural dyes easier.

Prepare your fixative as follows:

**Berries:** Dissolve ½ cup salt in 8 cups cold water

**Other plant material:** Blend 1-part white vinegar to 4 parts cold water

Place your damp fabric, yarn, etc. in the fixative solution for an hour then rinse with cool water. Now it's time to start the actual dyeing process:

1. Cover your countertop with something to protect it from accidentally getting stained and wear gloves to protect your hands.
2. Place the plant material or berries in a large non-reactive pot (like stainless steel or glass). Dye could stain some pots and spoons.
3. Fill the pot with twice as much water as plant material.
4. Simmer for an hour or so, until you get a nice dark color
5. Strain out the plant material and return the liquid to the pot.
6. Carefully place the fabric in dye bath and bring to a slow boil; simmer for an hour or so, stirring once in a while.
7. Check your fabric, remembering it will be lighter when it dries. After an hour you should have a nice color, but darker hues can be achieved by allowing your fabric to sit longer, even

overnight. Turn off the pot after an hour to allow the fabric to sit in the warm water as long as needed.

8. When the color you want has been achieved, remove from pot and rinse in cold water. Some color run should be expected as the excess dye is washed out.
9. Dry as usual.

This is one of the ways our ancestors achieved the different colors in fabrics in their day. You ought to try it to see what you get. Do it on sheets, pillowcases, towels and even undies,

If you have any horticultural/gardening questions, our Hot Line is open Tuesday and Thursday 10AM – 2PM at 409 882-7010 or we can contact thru our website <https://txmg.org/orange> or our Facebook page Orange County Texas Master Gardeners.

Our monthly meetings are open to the public, held the second Thursday of each month at the Orange County EXPO Center, 11475 FM 1442, Orangefield at 6PM with a potluck supper, followed by the business meeting at 6:30PM and a speaker on horticultural subjects every month or so.

Our Annual Bloomin' Crazy Plant Fair will be Saturday, March 14, 8AM – 1PM at Cormier Park, 8235 FM 1442, Orangefield. Check our website and Facebook for more information. We will start our annual Master Gardener Certification class on April 2 and are taking applications now. For more information can be found on both our website and Facebook page on any of the above.