

Wild at Heart

Be wild, whatever your age

Making Natural Dyes

For thousands of years before the invention of synthetic colours in the 19th Century people made colours out of naturally found materials such as plants, rocks and insects. The dyes and pigments were used for dyeing clothes and painting on cave walls and later for making pigments and paints.

If you want to try making natural dyes at home to decorate a fabric triangle to make some Wild at Heart bunting, we suggest you stick with simple store cupboard items such as onion skins, beetroot and used coffee grounds or teabags. If you want to take this hobby up further there is a lot of information online but be warned – it can get to be all-consuming!!

Onion Skin Dye



This is a very simple dye that makes an orangey yellow colour and usually gives good results so is a good place to start.

Collect up the outer layers of onions as you use them and put aside. They are dry and papery so won't go mouldy. You can do this over a couple of weeks. The more onions skins you use the darker the end result will be but for a small piece of bunting you should get some good colour from about 5 or 6 onions.

When you are ready to make the dye put them in a large pan and cover generously with cold water. Bring to the boil and simmer gently for 1 hour.

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Remove all the onion skins by draining through a colander or sieve but BE CAREFUL! You want to collect the precious dye liquid into a bowl. Return the dye liquid to the pan. You want to end up with enough water to cover the bunting with room for it to move around. Top up with cold water if you need to.

Place the bunting in the dye liquid and leave for as long as you can, but at least overnight is good. Stir it occasionally with a wooden spoon – but not your best one as it will turn yellowy!

When you remove the bunting rinse it under a cold tap to remove any excess colour and hang out to dry.

You can repeat this process with different food items and explore their dye giving properties!



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