



DYEING FABRIC WITH NATURAL DYES

Step 1: Scour the fabric

Scouring the fabric removes debris, oil and any chemicals from manufacturing still on the fabric. For best results, you should scour all fabric – even well used fabric before dyeing.

Use a non-reactive pot, I used an old enameled canning pot.

For plant fibers use 1 tablespoon of washing soda for every gallon of water. Simmer for 1 hour. Rinse thoroughly.

For animal fibers use 1 tablespoon of ph neutral dishwashing soap or natural olive oil soap in lukewarm water for every 8oz of fabric. Hand wash and rinse thoroughly.

You can store the dried fabric to dye later if you wish to.

Step 2: Mordant the fabric

Mordant will help the dye stay on your fabric long term and can be done before, during or after the dye process. For upcycling, I prefer to scour and mordant several items at once and then store them until I can dye them.

Iron, alum (with or without cream of tartar) are safe mordants. Copper, tin and chrome are no longer used in natural dyeing because of the toxicity to the dyer.

To mordant cotton such as the flannel shirts, use 1oz aluminum sulfate and 1 tablespoon cream of tartar for every 4oz of dried fabric. Put aluminum sulfate and cream of tartar in non-reactive pot with enough lukewarm water to cover fabric. Stir the fabric and let sit overnight for 8-10 hours. You can stir it occasionally.

Once you remove the fabric from the aluminum sulfate, you can pour the left over mordant around any acid loving plants – blueberries, azaleas, pine, etc.

Step 3: Dye the fabric

While the mordant is sitting overnight, prepare the black bean water. Put the black beans in a large bucket and fill it with cold water – you will need a couple of gallons of bean water so use a big bucket. Let it sit overnight. You can stir the beans several times but don't stir during the last few hours, you want the bean particles to settle to the bottom. When your bean water is a pretty, dark color ladle it off into another pot (I just used the same enamel pot I used for scouring and for the mordant). Add damp shirt, making sure the bean water covers them. You might need to weight the shirt down – I used a plate to keep mine submerged. Let sit for several days. Yes, days! Every once in a while stir the shirt so that it dyes evenly. It will begin to smell bad but try to let it sit for 3 days. Do NOT use hot water or put the dye bath on the stove and use heat to try to hurry up the process. The bean water will turn from a lovely steely gray to a not so lovely brown when it's heated.

Don't forget to cook the soaked beans for dinner. They are completely edible.

The left over bean water can go in your compost or water outside plants.

Step 4: Wash and dry the fabric

Once the shirt has been in the bean water for a few days, wring it out and toss it in the wash by itself to remove any excess dye. Dry in the dryer or by hanging.

Step 5: Enjoy your NEW shirt!