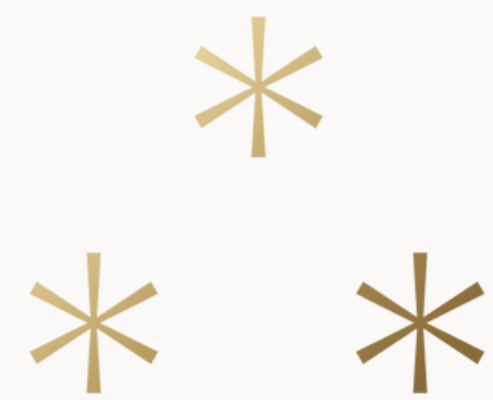


NATURAL DYEING WITH TEA



WITH SIAN CORNISH

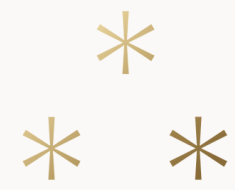


LANCASTER
& CORNISH



“Create colour from plants in your own kitchen cupboard”

ARE YOU READY TO START YOUR JOURNEY IN
DYEING TEXTILES USING NATURAL DYES?
WELCOME TO MY E-BOOK FOR INSPIRATION
USING TEA !



I am a textile artist based in Cornwall connecting people and landscape, colour and textiles through my art. Working from my studio and dye garden I teach the art of botanical dyeing at craft centres and locations around Cornwall and the UK. Sustainability is at the heart of my work, whether reducing resource use, minimising waste or enhancing wellbeing through a deeper connection between ourselves and nature.

I invite you to join me on this joyful and exploratory journey into the world of plant colour.

Sian x



To start your plant dye journey, there is no easier dye to access and experiment with than tea. Using the humble tea bag, you can achieve soft tones of browns and oranges on silks, cotton and linens. How satisfying to have your cup of tea, dye with the waste product and even compost the remains!

It seems likely that at least some botanical colours were originally discovered by chance as a by-product of the cooking process, so it makes perfect sense to start our quest for colour in the kitchen, the heart of the home...

What you will find in these pages

- **An introduction to natural dyeing**
- **Simple explanations of important words and natural dye jargon**
- **Step by step process to making a dye with tea**
- **Inspiration and project ideas**
- **Tips for consistent and satisfying results**
- **Ideas for experimenting and exploring**
- **Fabric aftercare, note taking and more!**

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DYEING
WITH TEA
Grab a cuppa!

Tea (*camellia sinensis*) is a mixture of variously processed leaves of one of the varieties of an evergreen shrub, *camellia sinensis*, which is the most popular non-alcoholic beverage in the world. This classic hot beverage is beloved by the British. It is certainly my 'go-to' drink - a comforting brew poured from one of my collection of tea pots, drunk several times a day.

Whilst already a popular drink, the tea plant arrived in Britain in 1768 from China*. It can be grown outdoors in the UK, and in Cornwall (South West England), where I live, the milder climate has enabled the success of the Tregothnan Estate growing tea since 2005.

** Ref: The Origin of Plants, Maggie Campbell-Culver, Eden Project Books, 2001*

As well as its popularity as a beverage, the brown liquid derived by soaking the leaves (or more recently tea bags) has been used to refresh home linens for decades, and was even used to colour ladies legs in the 1940's as an alternative to stockings, when they became unavailable during the Second World War (and the more desirable 'liquid stocking' product was not easily found).



Who can do this?

This e-book is intended for the complete novice as well as artists, fashion designers, home crafters and artisans interested in developing their practice and creating colour in a way that feels instinctive and life-affirming.

Perfect as a simple introduction to the art of natural dyeing, this e-book will:

- Banish overwhelm and provide simple definitions of common terms
- Remove the fear of starting your natural dye journey
- Highlight there is no need for specialist equipment or space
- Give you the confidence to use natural dyes in your own home
- Explain step by step the process
- Provide inspiration for projects and note taking

With simple instructions, I will guide you through creating natural colour using the humble tea bag, a joyful beginning to your natural dye journey.

Using fabric scraps, paper and even dried beans to soak up your dye, you can develop a fun, low cost and sustainable craft practice using items that might otherwise be wasted – an unexpected source of colour from your cupboard.



Why do this?



Before synthetic dyes were first introduced in the 1800's, all garments and textiles were dyed with natural dyes. Commercial synthetic dyes are derived from crude oil, and there are plentiful statistics on the damaging environmental and social impacts of these dyes in the fashion industry, so it is of no surprise that creative individuals and companies are embracing traditional and less polluting methods.

On a personal level, there is a mindful aspect to working with plant dyes. The chance to slow down and observe, make notes and enjoy the process of small scale plant dyeing is very satisfying and provides moments of calm in our often hectic lives.

LEAF OR BAG?

Spill the tea!



Whether you choose loose leaf or tea bags, this is a great place to start your plant dye journey. Tea is immensely satisfying as a home dye, rich in tannins which create good colour fastness (so the colour stays for longer!) and there is no specialist equipment required.

You can use your usual tea bags, or leaves, for this dye (low cost tea bags can be very rich in black tea) and you can expect good results even re-using spent tea bags that you have already made a cuppa with!

Using the simple principles in this guide, you will be well on your way in your plant dye journey.

NATURAL DYES

INTRODUCTION

Natural dyes are colours or pigments that occur naturally in plants, trees, roots, lichens, fungi, molluscs and insects.

There is something very soulful and satisfying about producing colour from nature. From mark making to dress making, colour plays an important part in all of our lives.

Humans seem hard-wired to preserve colour, and historically this was done using natural dyes from plants, minerals and earth pigments.

Scientific evidence confirms the presence of natural reds and oranges in Egyptian tombs, dating back to 2600 BC, and further back in time there is archaeological evidence supporting over 10,000 years of plant dyeing in human history.

Historically, all textiles were dyed with these natural dyes, with the discovery and processing of colour pigments only starting just over 100 years ago or so.





In the present day, we can explore ways to create colour and pattern on textiles and paper using those same botanical ingredients.

Through experimentation, practice and careful note making, colour can be produced and used to dye simple garments, paper or home linens.

Embracing slow living and slow craft movement principles in the creation of colour, it is easy to imagine that we are forging links with the past, re-imagining colour alchemy in our own homes.

There are certain dye plants, such as woad, madder and weld, that have been used for many hundreds, even thousands of years because they are able to produce reliable and bright colours. However, most plants just produce a yellow / brown colour.

I enjoy using a range of dyes, experimenting with the more common, historical dyes, as well as those found in the kitchen cupboard and foraged responsibly from my own garden and the countryside of Cornwall (always forage responsibly).



GLOSSARY OF NATURAL DYE TERMS

***Weight of Fibre (WOF)**

A convenient way of measuring the amount of dye and mordant used, expressed as a percentage of the dry weight of fibre.

Weight of Fibre x % = Weight of Dyestuff

Weight of Fibre x % = Weight of Mordant

Mordant

From the French verb ‘mordre – to bite’, mordants are metallic salts (including aluminium, iron and copper) that help the bonding of the dyestuff pigments to the fibre. Fibres are typically soaked in a solution of these metal salts, using various chemical combinations depending on the nature of the textile (protein or cellulose).

Modifier

Modifiers may be substances that alter the acidity or alkalinity (pH) of the dye bath. These can be acids, e.g. white vinegar, lemon juice, citric acid, or alkalis, e.g. soda ash or wood ash water. They can also be solutions of iron, or copper can also be used as modifiers as well as mordants. A small quantity of the modifier is added either to a pot of water or to some of the used dye bath.

Dye Bath

A container filled with dye used for the purpose of dyeing textiles.

Protein Fibres

Fibres from animals, such as silk and wool.

Cellulose Fibres

Fibres from plants, including cotton, linen (flax), hemp and jute.

Tannin

Natural chemicals produced by plants and contained in various concentrations within dyestuffs such as tea and coffee, also used as part of the mordant process for cellulose fibres. Can be colourless or impart their own colour.

Fugitive Dye

Fugitive ‘dyes’ do not last and the colour fades away due to external factors such as sunlight, heat and humidity.

Substantive Dye

A dye in which dye molecules are attracted by physical forces at the molecular level to the textile, requiring no mordant to bind.

03/05

SOURCING FABRICS AND EQUIPMENT



Textiles fall into two main categories:

Cellulose – derived from plants (cotton, linen, hemp etc)

Protein – derived from animals (silk, wool)

As you delve further into your exploration of natural dyeing, you will need to understand how to prepare each of these fabric types in a different way so that you get the best results.

However, for tea dyeing, we can keep things really simple!

Choose natural textiles (cotton, linen, silk, hemp), rather than synthetic. Old or vintage fabric that has been used and washed many times is perfect, and requires no further preparation. So, an old tea towel, old cotton sheeting or pillow case, or even some cotton string or thread. If you are using new fabric, it is best to wash thoroughly before use to remove dirt, pectin and waxes that may still be present from the manufacturing process.

If you want to stick strictly to store cupboard goods, you can even use household items such as eggs, dried pulses, beans, pasta or even rice.

Is lack of equipment and resources stopping you from starting your natural dye journey?

”



By using tea, you can strip back fear, use your kitchen equipment and the humble tea bag and still achieve beautiful results.

Equipment and Materials

- Plastic, stainless steel or glass pots to soak the fabric / paper in (for small items you can use old jam jars)
- Stainless steel or non-reactive pan(s)
- Stovetop for heating water
- Utensils (spoons or stirrer) for stirring dye baths and removing dyed items



HEALTH & SAFETY

Health and safety is a very important part of your dye kitchen set up.

Whilst you will only be using items from your kitchen for dyeing with tea, it is always best practice to keep separate utensils and pans used for dyeing only. The one exception to this, and the reason for starting your journey here, is tea: you can safely use the same pans and utensils as you cook with for this dye.



Tips for future:

- Store all dyes in clearly marked storage containers, in a dry place out of reach from children and animals.
- Work in a well ventilated area and avoid inhaling vapour from the dye pot. Do not eat, drink or smoke whilst working with dyestuff. Protect your skin, clothes and the dyeing area.
- Do not consume the dye liquids and keep them separate from food. Handle all chemicals (e.g. baking soda, bleach) with care, and use gloves and aprons as necessary. Avoid skin contact and accidental ingestion and inhalation.
- Use appropriate gloves when handling hot saucepans. Large saucepans full of liquid are heavy and it is safer to let the liquid cool down before handling them.
- Dispose of used dyes responsibly.



NOW YOU CAN MAKE YOUR FIRST DYE BATH

Preparing fabrics

If you are working with old fabrics that have been washed previously, simply soak in cold water and wring out before dyeing.

If you are using a new textile, wash as normal to remove any dirt, waxes or coatings.

When you move on from dyeing with tea, we will look at methods to prepare fabrics in a more rigorous way before dyeing, but this is a good start.

Preparing the dye bath

Put several tea bags or a few large spoons of tea leaves into your pan and pour over hot water, around 250 ml.

The more tea you add, the stronger the final colour will be. Leave for 15 minutes.

Dyeing Process

Place your items into the dye pot using a spoon (for paper, push down torn strips or squares so that the dye soaks in). It is a good idea to pre-soak larger pieces of fabric in a bowl of cold water first to ensure even dyeing.

Leave for 1/2 hour or more. The longer you leave them, the stronger the colour.

Remove after your desired colour has been achieved and leave to dry (or pat dry with kitchen paper.)

TIPS FOR ENJOYMENT AND SUCCESS



- Store your tea in a dry and well ventilated space
- Experiment with different strengths of dye bath (more or less tea), as well as the length of time you leave your item in the pot.
- Make sure you have enough room in the dye bath/pot for your fabric to have plenty of room to move around and absorb the dye. Cramped fabric will lead to patchy dyeing – which can be fun, but might not be your desired result.
- Keep notes so you can replicate the results you like.
- Re-use tea bags (you could dry them out once used)



TRY THESE ALTERNATIVES

- Use black and green tea to make dye, both of which contain tannins which will produce satisfying results. You can also experiment with herbal teas for a larger colour range, although these colours may not last as long as the black and green tea results. You could try:
 - Redbush tea
 - Mint tea or
 - Hibiscus tea
- Leave tea bags or leaves in for a mottled effective
- Experiment with strength of dyestuff (i.e. more or less tea!)



EXPLORE

05/05

THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING -
YOUR NATURAL JOURNEY STARTS
HERE



The fun starts here!

Now you have a basic understanding of the principles, you can explore and enjoy the process of natural dyeing. Here are some ideas for you to try, using tea!

- Shibori (tie-dye) linen napkins - add a vintage look to an old linen napkin or tea towel or even create a really large pot to dye an old cotton pillowcase or sheet – no waste here!
- Dye a cotton string washing bag
- Refresh an old t-shirt or white shirt
- ‘Antique’ some watercolour paper look (think treasure map) for your art journal or just for fun
- Dye dried pulses (chickpeas, black eyed beans) and use for counting games etc with younger children

TOP TIP

Make notes throughout the process – the weight of fabric, how many tea bags, how long did you leave your fabric in the dye bath, and what were the results.

Include samples of your colour, photographs, sketches as well as details.



COLOUR-FAST?

Natural colour can last for centuries, but some may be more fleeting, and we call these ‘fugitive’ dyes, including many berries and red cabbage. In this e-book, the focus is on tea, which is rich in tannins and classed as a ‘substantive dye’ - in other words, the dyes bond with a fibre without the use of a mordant.



SOURCING FABRICS

Look out for natural fibres at charity/thrift stores – you can tear these into strips to experiment with.



WHAT NEXT?

Lightfastness and colourfastness varies from dye to dye. For example, the incredible yellow dye of Turmeric is notoriously quick to fade. Embrace this aspect of natural colour, use it to make your own observations about how long the colour lasts, and in what conditions (by a window or in a dark box, for example). Re-dye old pieces, perhaps using a different dye.



AFTERCARE

Treat with care and colour will last longer. Gentle washing, and natural drying will increase longevity. Enjoy and use your dyed textiles if you want to, embrace slow-crafting, and re-infuse the item with love and colour as colours fade and seasons change.



KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Health & Safety first - start your dye journey with tea and safely use home pans and utensils
- This journey should be fun! Enjoy, experiment and explore



WANT TO CHAT OR LEARN MORE?

Continue your dye journey with me and learn
about dyeing with:

Pet

- Onion skins, coffee and kitchen staples
- Seasonal flowers and plants
- Traditional dye recipes from around the world

QUESTIONS?
Pop me an email

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Sian x