



NUA  
Summer  
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Series

# Ethical fabric dyeing

Workshop developed by  
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## Objective

This workshop focuses on using foraged and organic matter such as plants, flowers, food-waste and natural pigments to extract colour in order to dye up-cycled fabrics and garments.

## You will need

- Apron
- Rubber gloves\*
- Water supply
- Heat supply (The kitchen hob)
- Tongs
- 2 x saucepans, 1 x lid, 1 sieve (or colander)
- Twine (or strong string)
- Scissors
- White or cream fabric remnants or garment (must be made from natural fibres like cotton, viscose, wool, silk, linen and denim)
- Bowl (big enough to fill with cold water + your piece of fabric)
- Baking soda
- Onion skins, red cabbage, lemon, baking soda, found flowers and turmeric powder

\*Your hands will get stained from the ingredients which does wash off eventually. If you'd prefer this to not happen then please wear rubber gloves.

## Background

Dyeing textiles with natural dyes is an ancient skill that Archaeologists have found evidence of dating back to the Neolithic period. In China dyeing with plants, barks and insects has been traced back more than 5,000 years.

Natural dyeing is a process which stands the test of time and is used as a sustainable alternative to chemical dyes which were introduced to mainstream practices just 30 years ago, after being invented from coal in the mid-1800s.

Using natural dyes is safer for yourself and safer for the environment. Our skin is our largest organ and we absorb what we wear and touch. Using natural dyes for our clothing and textiles has proven health benefits and is also eco-friendly. Re-using the surplus of what mother nature offers creates a closed-loop-system where everything is recycled and regenerated over and over.

## Activity

### Task 1

Pre-mordanting: The process used before dyeing fabric with natural ingredients. We do this so the colour sticks to the fibres

- Half fill both saucepans with water and pre-heat (keep a lid on one.)
- Fill the bowl with cold water.
- Once you see the water steaming, add 1 tablespoon of baking soda into the pan.
- Add your fabric and stir for 2 minutes. If your fabric isn't completely submerged in the water, add some more.
- After a few minutes, turn off the heat and with your tongs take the fabric from the hot saucepan and place into the bowl of cold water.
- Once your fabric has cooled, squeeze the excess water and lay flat onto your work surface.

### Top tip:

For best results you can even leave your fabric overnight to really soak.



## Top tip:

- Make sure to use minimal turmeric, it's a very strong pigment and will be dominant if you add too much, use a maximum of half a teaspoon.
- The cabbage is a pH sensitive ingredient, meaning it will change colour if you add an alkaline or acidic ingredient. Have some fun by sprinkling the baking soda and lemon onto the red cabbage.

Red Cabbage = Purple/Blue

Red Cabbage + Lemon (acidic) = Pink

Red Cabbage + Baking soda (alkaline) = Green

## Task 2

### Using our ingredients to dye the fabric

- Begin with your largest ingredients and lay them on top of the fabric and spread out to the edges.
- Continue to add each ingredient individually and fill in the spaces with the final smaller ingredients.
- Once you're happy with the fabric being covered with the ingredients, begin to roll vertically from the bottom up. Tuck in the edges whilst rolling the fabric up so you contain all of your ingredients inside. Make sure to keep the tension even!
- With your twine, measure 4 x the length of your fabric roll and cut.
- Using your dominant hand, hold the piece of rolled up fabric and ingredients, and use the other hand to wrap up the fabric. Keep the distance even and fill in larger gaps so that the fabric is secure. Tuck the end of the twine into itself when finished.

## Task 3

### Colour extraction + aftercare

- Dip the piece of fabric in some water so that it is wet.
- Place your rolled-up piece of fabric that has been tied/bound up into the sieve or colander.
- Lower the sieve/colander into your saucepan (which has been preheating) and add the lid so that your fabric is being steamed.
- Leave to steam for 15 minutes.
- After 15 minutes, turn off the heat and with your tongs lift the fabric onto your worktop and leave to cool down completely.
- Once your fabric is cool, begin to unwrap and see the glorious colours you have created. Take pictures of this part so that you can see which ingredients have created what colours!
- Shake off the excess ingredients and put them into your food bin/compost.
- Leave the fabric to dry completely, then hand wash with cold water and gentle soap (no bleach products!)



## Top tip:

Cut a strip of fabric off the end to save and see the difference in before/after washing.

## Conclusion

Mother nature offers so many fun ingredients to play with and see what colours you can create. Your gardens and woodlands are a playground to begin exploring! The fast Fashion and Textile industry is one of the largest polluters in the world. Let's begin to re-use what we already have in a safe and sustainable way!



## Find out more about MiaSylvia:



[@miasylviaa](#)



[Website](#)

## Further resources

[wildcolours.co.uk](#)

[botanicalcolors.com](#)

[rebeccadesnos.com](#)

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