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Harvesting Color: How To Find Plants And Make Natural Dyes



Synopsis

Selection of the Craftersâ™ Choice Book Club Beautiful natural dyes from plants found in the wild or grown in your own backyard. As more and more crafters are discovering, dyeing your own fabric can yield gorgeous colors. Now master dyer Rebecca Burgess identifies 36 plants that will yield beautiful natural shades and shows how easy it is to make the dyes. Pokeweed creates a vibrant magenta, while a range of soft lavender shades is created from elderberries; indigo yields a bright blue, and coyote brush creates stunning sunny yellows. Gathering Color explains where to find these plants in the wild (and for those that can be grown in your backyard, how to nurture them) and the best time and way to harvest them; maps show the range of each plant in the United States and Canada. For the dyeing itself, Burgess describes the simple equipment needed and provides a master dye recipe. The book is organized seasonally; as an added bonus, each section contains a knitting project using wools colored with dyes from plants harvested during that time of the year. With breathtaking color photographs by Paige Green throughout, Gathering Color is an essential guide to this growing field, for crafters and DIYers; for ecologists and botanists; and for artists, textile designers, and art students.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What sets this book apart from other books on natural dyeing is the extensive information on where to find the plants (gardens, farmer's markets, fields, forests), and on when and how to harvest the plants. But the book also includes complete, illustrated instructions on how to dye wool fiber and yarn using inexpensive, easy-to-find equipment, and many, many recipes for making natural dyes

from specific plants. The book is divided into two parts: Part One includes a brief historical discussion of gatherers and dyers, describes necessary materials and tools for natural dyeing, and sets out a "master dye bath" and other general recipes for dyeing. In this part, the author cautions that national and state parks have strict no-harvest rules. However, she notes that national forests allow harvesting for personal use, that water and open-space districts will often grant harvesting permits, and that other sources for harvesting plants exist. The author also explains that she has included no recipes for tin, chrome, or copper-powder mordants (mordants bind the dye and fabric tightly), because widespread discarding of the metallic leftover dye water could quickly lead to unhealthy concentrations of these toxic metals in local soil. Clearly, the author is highly dedicated to the cause of environmental preservation, but her informative text is gentle in tone, and neither preaches nor communicates any "eco-politically correct" sense of superiority. Part Two, which makes up the bulk of the book, describes the individual dye plants, and is organized by the four harvesting seasons. Each plant has its own mini-section, which includes (1) a U.S.

Rebecca Burgess' new book is an outgrowth of over a decade's worth of teaching natural plant dyeing and advocating for a more environmentally-friendly manner of creating our clothing. She worked on the book at the same time that she was 'living' the Fibershed Project, with the goal of only wearing clothing made from products within a 150-mile radius of her Marin County, California home for one year. The book contains information about unique California native plants, such as toyon and coffeeberry, and the dye colors that they produce, but it is far more than simply a California guide. It covers dye plants with a long history, such as indigo, and new methods to obtain stunning colors from plants such as pokeberry. Each featured plant is discussed and accompanied by a photo of the entire plant, often within its native habitat. Information about time to gather, how to cultivate, and parts of the plant to use for dyeing fibers are included, along with generous photos of yarns dyed in the colors obtained from each plant, and a map of the United States highlighting where the particular plant can be found growing in the wild. Burgess brings her high standard of environmental consciousness into the book, stressing the importance of the choices we make in what we use as both consumers and artists. She discusses mordants (substances used to 'fix', or keep the dye in the fiber or fabric for the long term), and only advocates using materials that are non-toxic, both while in use in the dye process and when the wastes are disposed. She also addresses the benefits of working to source your raw materials close to home, and how involvement with natural dyes can help you help grow a strong local economy.

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