

How to Tuesdays

Dyeing Eggs with Plants

Dyeing with plants is a time-honored, tried-and-true, safe and natural method of coloring eggs.

First choose a mordant (fancy name for something that "sets" the color): alum, cream of tartar or white vinegar. You can proceed without one, but you will have far better success with deeper richer color.

Next, select your herbs and spices. There are hundreds of plants to dye with but this will get you started.

Blue: woad or red cabbage

Lavender/blue: hibiscus, red grape juice

Gold: tumeric

Yellow: safflower, safron, carrot tops, marigold, goldenrod, cosmos, chamomile, plantain, agrimony

Lt. Orange: curry, carrots, tansy shoots, paprika

Red: St. Johns Wort, dandelion root

Red brown: chili powder

Tan yellow: yarrow

Green: coltsfoot, rosemary, spinach, hyssop, tansy, marjoram, golden delicious apple peel

Pink: beets, sorrel, pickery, madder, raspberries, cranberries

Purple/lavender: blueberries, violets

Brown: onion skins, coffee, 4 black tea bags, comfrey, rosehips, fennel, juniper berries, burdock

Black: black walnut, alder

And, here is the basic recipe:

1 Tbls mordant

4 cups water

2-4 Tbls ground or finely chopped herb or spice

or 1 cup whole, cut, sifted herb

non-aluminum pan

OK, one more choice to make: hot process or cold process.

COLD: Bring your mordant, dyestuff and water to a boil; reduce heat and simmer for 1/2 hr to 3 hrs with the lid on depending on the depth of color you are looking for. Strain and cool. Add egg; soak until desired color is reached. You can even refrigerate overnight. In fact BE SURE to refrigerate if you plan to eat the eggs. We always eat them, but I know so many folks who don't. Especially after kids have played hide/find, hide/find for two days.

HOT: Bring mordant, dyestuff and water to a boil, add eggs. Simmer 15 minutes then remove from heat. Cover and let sit 15 minutes more. Remove eggs. Rinse. This process gives you better color, but your eggs are usually overcooked; a moot point if the kids play crochet or bowl with them.

Special effects: vegetable oil adds a glossy sheen. Prior to coloring make patterns by wrapping egg in rubber bands, masking tape or leaves & nylon stocking. Dab with a sponge while egg is still wet from dye. Drop oil into dye for a marble effect.

Perfect eggs: Allow eggs to sit at room temperature for 10 minutes. Put into pan, cover with cold water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, drain, then cover with cold water. Let eggs sit until cool, drain and refrigerate.

Plant dyed eggs are generally beautiful pastels. It's so much fun to play around with and sometimes the color is a total surprise from what you were expecting. It's a learning experience with children and you have the added peace of mind that you aren't putting yet one more chemical into your family.