

Natural Solar Dyeing with Karen Tam

Suitable for ages 8 and up (with assistance/supervision recommended for 8-13 years)



Materials List

1. Gather dye materials from food scraps such as,
Onion skins – outer dry layers,
Passionfruit rinds – rinsed and chopped in slices, dark purple rinds are best for dyeing
Turmeric spice powder from the pantry
2. Clean pasta sauce jars, or plastic honey pots which have a tight fitting lid. One jar required for each dye.
3. White washed cotton fabric – approx. 20cm square.
You may upcycle old hankies, or cut up old bedsheets or T shirts. Fabrics must be a natural fibre such as cotton and pre-washed. Wool or silk also dye extremely well, and better than cotton.
4. Found tools – things like rubber bands, paddle pop sticks, jam jar lids or bottle tops, marbles or pebbles to help create your dye patterns



Some tools you might find around the house

5. Warm water – about 50 degrees. Can use from a regulated hot water tap, or use the leftover water from the kettle once cooled down to this temperature.

Method

1. Dye techniques and preparing the fabric
 - a) *Itajime* or block resist technique

Take a piece of cloth and fold like a fan. Then the rectangular cloth the other way, so that you end up with a square shape, large enough to fit the bottle tops, or jar lids on either side. You need 2 lids the same size for this to work.

Secure the lids with a rubber band so that the lids act like a clamp to resist the dye (you can also use paddle pop sticks to make a stripe, see third sample in the first picture above)

b) Circle shapes

Using the marbles or pebbles, wrap each marble inside a section of the cloth, and secure with rubber band. Continue until you have no further fabric to work with.

c) Scrunch designs

Scrunch the fabric in random ways, and secure with rubber band or string.

d) Stripes (as below)

Using rubber bands or fabric ribbon scraps, bunch the fabric up and tie across in horizontal stripes.



Try making stripes by tying fabric ribbons around your fabric.

2. Prepare your dyes by putting the food waste into the jars. Add 1.5 cups of warm water. Mix until the food waste is submerged. If using turmeric, use about 1 tablespoon to 1.5 cups water. Take your fabrics and gently place in the liquid until it is covered with the liquid. Add more water if necessary. Put the lid on.
3. Place your jars in a sunny spot. Check every day to make sure the fabric is still submerged. After two or three days, the fabric should be nicely coloured.
4. Remove the fabric and pour the dye into an unused area of your garden, around some decorative shrubs (do not pour on edible plants).
5. Squeeze excess liquid gently from the cloth bundle and put in a warm shaded place to dry. Once touch dry, remove the tools (rubber bands, lids etc.) from the cloth and unfold. Dry in shade.
6. Leave for 5 days, and then rinse in cold water. Dry in shade.
7. Your cloth is now ready to use!

Things to note:

- You may wish to wear rubber gloves when handling the wet dyes and fabric.
- Turmeric may stain and run on subsequent washes.
- Natural dyes are subject to fading. This is an introduction level video to extracting colour.
- You may try other natural ingredients such as tea leaves/bags, coffee grounds, red cabbage, berries.
- Onion skins may produce deeper colour if left to dry for a week before use, and passionfruit skins can be frozen first as they release more intense colour this way.
- Don't add too much water to the dye material (food scraps) as it will dilute the colour. Try leaving longer than 3 days for darker colour.
- Check your dye daily. If any signs of mould start to appear, discard and start again.

Karen Tam is a textile designer and artist based in Sydney and has studied textile design and dyeing at Ultimo TAFE and with various leading dye teachers. She combines learned and experimental techniques, also using illustration, screen and digital printing. She has held workshops in Sydney on natural dyeing and screen printing. She is particularly drawn to the natural world, traditional art and textiles, and the art of making by hand.

You can find out more about Karen and her practice at karentamdesigns.com

We would love to see your work! Ask your parent or carer to post a photo on Instagram and tag @mosmanart