



Dye Your Own Yarn, Naturally

Written By: Emily Smith

TOOLS:

- [Container \(1\)](#)
[or jar that can fit your fiber and extra space for water](#)
- [Dust mask \(1\)](#)
[if you are working with powder](#)
- [Dye pot with lid \(1\)](#)
- [Kettle \(1\)](#)
- [Portable cooking stove \(1\)](#)
[or hotplate, optional. You can use your home stove, but it's advised to use a portable stove in a well-ventilated area.](#)
- [Strainer \(1\)](#)
- [Wooden spoon \(1\)](#)

PARTS:

- [Mordant \(1 tbsp\)](#)
[\(alum, iron, or copper\). In this tutorial, I used alum. Iron would yield a deeper brown color. You can purchase a mordant online at \[Earthues: A Natural Dye Company\]\(http://www.earthues.com/index.html\) \(<http://www.earthues.com/index.html>\).](#)
- [Fiber \(1\)](#)
[to dye](#)
- [Oak leaves \(1 bushel\)](#)

SUMMARY

Natural dyeing is a great way to learn more about the plants growing around you, as well as how your yarn is processed. Most commercially dyed wool is done so with chemical or acid dyes, since natural dyeing is more variable, and requires quite a lot of plant materials to dye on a commercial scale. Whenever dyeing at home, it is advisable to always research the

materials you are working with - plants can be poisonous! Find out how they react when boiled, and if you're foraging for materials, how much of one plant you can take from an area without damaging the surrounding environment. For the most part, it's a lot of fun! And you can get some really interesting and rewarding results.

Project originally posted on [CRAFT](#).


Step 1 — Gather materials



- Gather all of the materials needed for dyeing. A general rule of thumb is to add equal weights of natural dyestuff (in this case, oak leaves) to the weight of fiber being dyed. So, if you're going to be dyeing 100 grams of fiber, you'll need an equal weight of dry oak leaves.


Step 2 — Prepare water for leaves



- Place your leaves in your dye pot.
- Never cook or store food in a pot or container that has been previously used to dye or mordant materials. So, keep your dyeing separate from your cooking. Do not eat while you're dyeing, always wash your hands if you come into contact with any materials, and when handling powders, it is advised to wear a dust mask. 
- It's best to first boil water, which is then to be poured over the leaves, and settled. While the water is boiling, move on to the next step.

Step 3 — Pre-mordant the fiber



- Every natural dye requires a mordant. They work by adhering to both the fiber and the dye, fixing the color to the fiber. Chemical mordants are metallic salts of aluminum, copper, or iron, and they can be purchased as a powder or crystals. Natural mordants can be obtained from sumac leaves, oak galls, or rhubarb leaves. Alum (used here) is the most commonly used, and the least toxic. 
- It's time to pre-mordant your wool. Pour around a tablespoon or so of your mordant into a container. (The recommended ratio is 3 ounces of alum per pound of fabric.)
- Add your fiber, and enough water to cover your fiber, into the container.
- Let your fiber soak in the mordant overnight. Be sure that it has been mixed sufficiently so that the alum is equally applied.

Step 4 — Prepare leaves



- Pour boiling water over your leaves. Put the lid on the dye pot, and let it sit overnight. Stir a few times.
- The next day, bring your dye bath to a boil. This will extract more tannin from the leaves, and will give you a richer color. Let it simmer for around an hour or so.

Step 5 — Dye and dry



- Strain the solution into a container. Throw out the leaves.
- Pour the dye solution back into the dye pot.
- Add the fiber to be dyed. Allow the materials to simmer for 1-3 hours. Soak overnight once the dye bath cools down.
- Once the wool has been sufficiently absorbed by the dye, rinse the wool under a tap, and set to dry.