

Clothing in the past



Glossary

- Bast** Bast fibre or 'skin fibre' is fibre collected from the skin or bast surrounding the stem of a plant. These fibres have higher tensile strength than other kinds, and are therefore used for ropes, yarn and paper.
- Carding** This is the straightening of the wool to prepare it for spinning. This is done with carders, they look similar to dog brushes. They are used two at a time to brush the wool between them until all the fibres in a bunch align in the same direction.
- Crios** Irish word for a belt.
- Fabric** Cloth made of fibres.
- Fibre** The strings that are twisted together to make yarn or thread and fabric. There are two groups of fibres Natural and Man- made.
- Knitting** A method by which thread or yarn may be turned into cloth. Knitting consists of loops called stitches pulled through each other. The active stitches are held on a needle until another loop can be passed through them.
- Lanolin** A greasy yellow substance from wool-bearing animals. (Also called wool wax, wool fat or wool grease).
- Loom** A frame or machine of wood or other material, in which a weaver forms cloth out of thread.
- Manmade fibre** Fibres that are made using chemicals. Each time a new chemical recipe is used to make fibre it is given a new name e.g. acrylic, nylon and polyester.
- Mordant** A substance usually metal or salt which chemically fixes dye to material e.g. alum, chrome, copper.
- Natural fibre** Animal and vegetable fibres are Natural as they are found in nature. The most common vegetable fibres are cotton and flax (used to make linen). The most common animal fibres are wool from sheep and silk from the silkworm.
- Napping** To form or raise a soft or fuzzy surface on fabric or leather.
- Pampooties** Shoes made from cows hide .
- Shearing** The process of removing the fleece from the sheep. This is done today with the electric clippers. In the past this was done with the sheep shears (a type of scissors).
- Spinning** To make (yarn) by drawing out, twisting, and winding fibres. To draw out and twist (fibres) into thread. This can be done using the drop spindle or the spinning wheel.
- Wool** A fibre derived from the coat of animals of the Caprinae family, principally sheep and goats (Mohair & Cashmere). Hair of other animals such as llamas, alpacas and rabbits (Angora) may also be called wool.
- Weaving** To interlace threads, yarns, strips, fibrous materials, etc. so as to form a fabric or material. To make cloth by interlacing the threads of the weft and the warp on a loom. The warp is the set of lengthwise yarns through which the weft is woven. The weft are threads or strands of yarn that are woven back and forth across the warp threads to make solid textile.

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Country Life

Education

Clothing in the past

Worksheet: Wool Dyeing with Onion Skins

Equipment & materials

- Knife
- Kitchen Paper
- Onion Skins
- Electric Hob
- Hot Water
- Liquid Dish Detergent
- Large Pot
- Rubber Gloves
- Vinegar
- Wooden Spoon
- White Wool Strips
- Mordant* (alum)

Preparation

Make sure the wool that is being used has been washed and cleaned, this will hold the dye better.

Put your white woollen strips in soapy water/ Liquid Dish Detergent for at least an hour or more so they will soak up the dye easily.

Activity

Step 1: Fill your dye pot with the onion skins; add lots of water to cover generously.

Step 2: Heat until very hot but not boiling.

Step 3: Add approximately 1 tablespoon of vinegar and stir with a wooden spoon.

Step 4: Next add your soapy wool to the pot.

Step 5: Layer the wool evenly for the first few minutes to start the dyeing process and then stir into the onion skins. The wool will soak up the dye to create beautiful gold/ yellow shade. When the water clears that is the sign that the wool has soaked up all the dye.

Step 6: Rinse off by hand and hang on the line to dry.

*If using mordant, start by adding prepared wool to water containing mordant and heat gradually, simmer gently for approx 15min, allow to cool and rinse, then proceed with dyeing. You will need 454g of dry wool to 75g Alum. (6 to 1) then go to Step 1.

Safety

- Use old pots that are not being used for food.
- Be careful when using a knife to take off the onion skins.
- Care is needed with very hot water.

WARNING!! MANY MORDANTS ARE POISONOUS and should not be inhaled or eaten. Always dilute mordant baths before disposing of them.

Background Information

Onion skins, wild plants and berries can make a variety of bright colours that were used long ago for dyeing clothes. These dyes are known as natural dyes.

There are two types of dyes:

Non-Mordant Dyes: These impart their colour direct to the wool or other material without any preliminary preparation.

Mordant Dyes: The fibre has to be prepared before it is dyed so that it can absorb the colour. This is known as mordanting. The 4 main mordants are Alum, Tin, Chrome & Iron.

Skills: Investigating and experimenting.

Follow-Up Activities

Why not try some other traditional materials for dyeing wool, here are some examples:

Yellow: heather, dock leaves, nettles **Brown:** Crottle (lichen), seaweed **Blue:** Blackberry

Remember

If you want the dye to stick permanently you need to use a mordant. (Alum is the most successful mordant for textiles found in powder/packet form in any chemist shop.)

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