A Beginner’s Guide to Eco Printing Fabric
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Eco-dyed cloth is made by bundling plant material with cloth then binding it and applying heat by steaming or simmering which transfers the colors from plants to the fabric. The process is fun and causes one to wonder what secrets are held inside the plants that surround us which we so often hardly take notice of. The following directions are intended to give you a starting point to your own exploration. All plants will render some color, but as our ancient ancestors learned only certain plants or plants combined with various adjuncts will render long lasting colors. So I encourage you to learn more and experiment. For the beginner silk is the easiest fabric to print on with this method...it really has an affinity to botanicals! Next to silk, wool and other animal fibers work well. Natural cellulose (plant)_fibers such as cotton, linen, bamboo and rayon can work, but need quite a bit more preparation. So I suggest the beginner work with silk. This doesn’t need to be expensive. You can find plenty of cheap silk fabric by recycling the “ugly” silk garments found in thrift stores.

Please remember although you are working with natural materials, that does not mean it is ok to ignore studio safety precautions. Gloves and protective clothing should be worn when handling plant and dye materials. Steaming should be done in a well-ventilated area, preferably outdoors. Do not use dying utensils for cooking!

Directions for eco Printing on Silk or Wool

Materials:
Natural fiber fabric (silk or wool fabric)
An assortment of plant leaves, flowers, twigs, nuts, seeds
White vinegar
Spray bottle
Small and (preferably rusty) metal objects, like pennies nails, brass hardware etc.
Stainless steel or porcelain pot with a rack
String

1. Spread wet or dry prepare (see final page for silk or wool fabric on a table.)

2. Arrange plants materials on the fabric (metal objects can be added to provide additional mordant and alter the color) Spritz with a solution of 50% vinegar and 50% water. *note the vinegar solution is optional you might want to try with and with out.

3. Fold into a bundle, inserting more plant materials if you wish.
4. Bind tightly with string.

5. Place in steamer with a few inches of water. Cover and steam over heat for at least one hour, longer may be better depending on what’s in your bundle. Make sure to monitor pot closely and add water if needed.

6. Leave overnight or longer before opening, if you have the patience a week or more is better!

Alternately you may wet the bundles with vinegar water and place it in a glass jar, seal the lid and place in it the sun for several days, weeks or even months.
Preparing Silk or Wool Fabric and Yarn for Natural Dyes.

(note with silk you can get good results are possible without a mordant but the silk should still be washed in hot water with synthrapol or orvas paste (in a pinch you try Dawn dish soap)

Silk, Wool, and all other Protein(Animal) Fibers

1. Prewash fabric in hot water with synthrapol or orvas paste
2. For each pound of fabric or yarn mix a mordant solution of 2 teaspoons alum and one teaspoon cream of tartar with water.
3. Pour into stainless steel, glass, or porcelain pot and add more water leaving enough room to add the fabric.
4. Wet the fabric and add to the cool mordant bath.
5. Gradually heat the water to 180 degrees F (but no more than 200 degrees F) Maintain heat for at least an hour.
6. Allow the fabric to cool gradually in the solution (about 12 hours)
7. Rinse the fabric and proceed with dying or line dry fabric and store for dying at a later date.

Alternately: Add the wet fabric and mordant solution to a glass jar. Close the lid and leave in a sunny spot for two or three days, longer is ok and possibly better.