

# COMPOST DYES & INKS

## Compost Colours: Five Natural Dyes from your Compost Pail

### Avocado Skins and Pits:

Currently Avocados are in season. To get enough material to dye with, you can save the skins and pits in the freezer. Avocados will give a light pink to tan from either skins or pits, or both combined. Pits must be crushed before soaking/boiling to prepare the natural dye bath. The pink would be achieved with an Alum mordant, and without boiling the dye bath.

### Pomegranate Skins:

Pomegranates were in season in November and early December, so will no longer be in your compost pail. However, when they are in season you can dry the skins for later use. Pomegranates will give a tan dye with Alum. With an iron mordant, Pomegranate skins may also produce a dark brown to black. An iron mordant can be achieved by dying in a cast iron pot or adding an old railway spike to the natural dye vat. Other old iron scraps, added to the vat, would also work to shift, sadden, the colour.

### Coffee:

Coffee stains, nasty light brown stains on your favourite white dress shirt, blouse, or pants. And on top of that, it doesn't come out. How nasty! But deliberately applied coffee can act as a natural dye. And those used coffee grounds that clog the sink, can provide colour without being expensive. Coffee is a tannin dye, and so produces tan colours. An Alum mordant will increase the colourfastness, while the addition of iron to the natural dye bath will sadden and deepen the colour. Like Pomegranates, there is a possibility of achieving a dark brown to black with the addition of iron to the dye bath.

### Tea:

Used tea bags can provide tea leaves to use for natural dye projects. Herbal teas, like chamomile, will produce different colours than regular black tea. Tea is like coffee but will produce a lighter natural dye colour. Tea can also be used to "antique" paper, just drop a still damp tea bag on the

paper and smear the tea bag around the edges of the paper. After the paper is dry, it will have a light brown variegated "antiqued" look.

### Carrot tops and skins:

Carrots can produce a yellowish dye. However, it is not colourfast. This is similar to the majority of yellows, like onion skins – also a compost pail dye. Carrots may be an interesting dye to try, just for the fun of it.

## Fugitive Natural Dyes: Top Five Plants to Never Use for Natural Dyes

### Onion skins

These handy compost pail dyes are often the first natural dye used by beginning natural dyers. It is safe, nontoxic, and common. But, it is also highly fugitive, and will fade beautifully in sunlight. Unlike some dyes, including some chemical dyes, this is one natural dye which looks beautiful when faded. Onion fades from a beautiful clear, bright, yellow, to a soft, muted, fall yellow.

### St. Johns Wort

This plant is not recommended for beginning natural dyers. It takes a lot of effort to harvest enough blossoms to dye with, though many regions are covered in fields of this beautiful herb. It gives beautiful red and burgundy colors, at first, but they rapidly fade to a blah beige. I would not recommend trying to knit a sweater out of St. Johns Wort dyed yarn, no matter how beautiful it looks. The colour will fade before you are done. It is an interesting dye to try for experimental purposes, but the colour is not fast for any sun-exposed project. .

Three other plants are recommended for children to use for natural dyes. These are Anthocyanin dyes which change colour based on pH level. They will change from a purple colour to a green - bluish shade when the pH changes.

### Red Cabbage

This plant is recommended for use with young children. I saw one child do a science fair project on dying with Red Cabbage and Beets, one year. Red Cabbage is useful as food, and as a pH sensor, though it is not as accurate as pH test strips. Red cabbage colour will change on your fabric, depending on pH, and it also fades rapidly. This is not a good natural dye to use, although it is

super fun to experiment with or use as a food-safe coloring on egg shells for Easter or something similar.

## Beets

These are also recommended on many natural dye lists, with no warning that they are probably about the most fugitive of all natural dyes. A relative of mine had a natural dye sample book. She had kept it in the dark for between 10-15 years. When she looked at it, all the lichen and most of the natural dyes were still bright and clear. But, the sample dyed with beets was WHITE, with no colour whatsoever. Beet dye had fled even though it had not been exposed to any sunlight or washing since the day it was dyed. So, again, while fun to use on food stuffs or to add color to your cooking, this is not a good plant for dying fiber.

## Blackberries and most other Berries and Fruits

These berries and others may stain your clothing, but like beets and red cabbage, they are not colourfast when you want them to be. If it is your favourite white T-shirt, you will never get the stain dots out, but if you are trying to colour fleece, it will fade like the ballistic beets. Other edible berries are the same, their colours are fugitive. Some non-edible berries do produce colourfast natural dye—like poke-berry. Edible berries can be used to add color to foods, but I do not recommend them for coloring fabric, yarn, or fleece.

To get the maximum satisfaction out of natural dying, I prefer using colourfast dyes. There are few things as depressing as dying a huge skein of yarn, with a hard-to-find natural dye, and then discovering that the colour fades rapidly in sunlight (which was my experience with Saint Johns' Wort.) There are far more colourfast dyes out there than fugitive natural dyes. Take your time and find the colourfast dyes near you, and enjoy dying with them.

Info Sourced From:

<https://www.wearingwoad.com/compost-colours-five-natural-dyes-from-your-compost-pail/>

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