

Discover! Creative Careers Week

Workshop: Creating your own fabric dye

Sometimes costume designers working in film, T.V. and live performance will need an item of clothing to be a particular colour which is not available to buy. In this instance dye can be used - either to dye a piece of clothing a different colour, or to dye the fabric itself before the clothes are even made.

Some dyes are toxic but, in this workshop, you will learn how to create a safe, natural dye from onion skins. You will discover the processes needed to achieve different intensities in colour.

You will need:

- The outside skins of 4 large onions
- A saucepan
- A sieve or colander
- 3 pieces of white cotton. I used scraps measuring 20 x10cm.
- A mixing bowl
- Kitchen tongs
- Vinegar - any kind
- Newspaper and some thin plastic sheeting to protect the work surface.
- A pan stand - something that you can put a hot pan on to protect the work surface
- Rubber gloves



WARNING

This experiment uses boiling water. Please ask an adult before you begin and ask them for help if you need it.





STEP ONE

Put the cloths in a bowl and cover with vinegar. We call this the mordant and it helps the fibres in the fabric to accept the dye.

STEP TWO

Put the onion skins into a saucepan with ample cold water to cover them plus an extra 2 or 3cm (approx). Bring to the boil and allow to simmer for 60 minutes
DO NOT ALLOW TO BOIL DRY



STEP THREE

After 45 minutes the water should be coloured a rich chestnut brown. If it isn't then keep the mixture simmering for another 15 minutes then check again.

STEP FOUR

Once the liquid in the pan has become a deep colour, strain the onions from the water using the sieve over a bowl. **MAKE SURE YOU KEEP THE WATER** this is what we need for the dying process.

The onions skins can be put in the compost bin.



STEP FIVE

Wring out the vinegar from the cloths - you might prefer to wear washing up gloves to do this. Put in the saucepan and pour the brown liquid from the bowl over the top. Now put this back on the stove and simmer again for 15 mins.



STEP SIX

While the pan is simmering, get ready your work station ready with a pan stand and the plastic sheet





STEP SEVEN

After 15 minutes you can take out one of the clothes. Put the pan on the pan stand and remove one of the clothes onto the plastic sheeting using the tongs.

Put the pan back for another 15 mins and then, using the same process, remove the 2nd cloth. Return the pan and final cloth back to the stove and simmer for another 15 mins before removing the final cloth.

STEP EIGHT

You should now have 3 different shades of dyed material!
Allow to dry before ironing flat and inspecting your new creations.



Now you've learnt the skill why not try this out with an old t-shirt and create a brand new wardrobe?

Jot down in the box below any skills you used or learnt during todays activity....



