

Australian Vegetable Dyes

One of the most effective dyes is that got from the common flat, black and grey lichen which grows on rocks and fences, it is a fast dye.

METHOD – Gather this lichen, preferably after rain, place in a vessel with alternate layers of wool or woollen material, fill up with cold water, put on fire and boil up. You will get the loveliest shades of colour, from pale yellow to rust red according to the length of time of boiling, and the amount of lichen used. When treated the same way the whitish green hairy lichen, called “old man’s beard” which grows mostly on old fences gives a faint sand colour, the proportions used should be 3% lichen to 1% wool. From the green cushiony moss which grows on rocks you get a rather pretty brownish colour when used in large proportions to the amount of wool, but of the three the flat black and grey lichen is by far the most satisfactory.

Cootamundra wattle leaves and blossom give green when mordanted with alum, the same when chrome is used as a mordant, produces dark brown, fresh wattle bark with alum and tarter gives a light tan, the same with Chrome (bi-chromate of potash) produces dark grey.

Lichen used for wool does not require Mordant.

TO WASH WOOL BEFORE DYEING – Tie skeins to prevent tangling. Put in hot soapy water, and in case of hand spun yarn, bring water nearly to the boil, stirring from time to time. Do not boil homespun yarn. Rinse well in cold clean water. If no mordant is required the wool is now ready to dye.

PROCESS OF DYEING – Enter dye stuff into pot with the necessary cold water, gradually raise the temperature. Enter the wool which has been previously wet, or you

may enter wool and dye stuff together in the course of three quarters of an hour, bring it to the boil, boil it till you get the colour you require, lift wool out and wash in clean, cold water. Shake out and dry on cloths line.

Steeping wool in dye after it is taken off the fire deepens the colour. It is the relation by weight of dye to wool matters irrespective of the amount of water, which is always just sufficient to allow free movement of the wool. Try and keep the wool below the dye when boiling, by poking it down with a clean stick.

Always lift wool out of dye before adding more dye to prevent uneven dyeing.

Never put wool into boiling dye.

MORDANT HOT – DYE COLD

THE CHIEF MORDANTS – Are (1) Alum, (2) Bi-Chromate of Potash, (3) Iron. Bi-chromate is the most useful.

TO MORDANT WOOL – Take dry wool and dip it in boiling water before mordanting in order to open the pores. After mordanting and dyeing dip it into cold water to close pores. Dissolve mordant in boiling water then put wool into mordant. Boil wool in mordant, stirring well, wash in clear water, and when chromate is used, dye at once.

TIME FOR MORDANTING

Boil alum, also iron, from half to one hour. Boil Bi-Chromate of potash from one to one and a half hours. When boiled sufficiently wash wool well and dye immediately. When mordanted with bi-chromate iron (sulphate of iron) is added to bath of dye in which wool has been boiled, then continue boiling half an hour or so longer to give a darker shade, proportion 5% of iron to 8% of wool. When using a chrome as a mordant do not let light in or the wool will colour unevenly.

QUANTITIES

ALUM – Take ¼ lb. of alum and one ounce of TARTAR, dissolved in boiling water, for every pound of wool. Too much alum makes the wool hard.

CHROME – Take ¼oz bi-chromate of potash to 1lb of wool, boil till chrome is dissolved before adding wool.

A “sadder” or “brightness” is sometimes added to the dye bath after the wool is dyed. Tin always “brightens”, iron (ferrous sulphate) “saddens” or darkens.

METHOD – Dissolve a small quantity of the “sadder” in hot water and add to dye pot, lifting out wool while doing so to prevent uneven colouring. Put wool back and leave it in dye and either steep or boil it until it has reached the shade required.

FRESH WATTLE BARK – TAN COLOUR

Mordant – Alum and Tartar

More than half a kerosene tin of bark. Machine wash wool. Cut bark into small pieces, soak overnight in cold water, boil two hours, strain and allow to cool.

Wash wool, mordant letting it boil half an hour, let cool in mordant.

Put in warm dye and boil for one hour.

FRESH WATTLE BARK – DARK GREY

Mordant – Bi-chromate of potash and tartar, boil for three quarters of an hour.

Boil in dye for half an hour, add small quantity of ferrous sulphate (iron) dissolved in hot water. Boil 20 minutes.

GUM TIPS – YELLOW

Mordant – Alum and tartar.

GUM TIPS – KHAKI

Mordant – Bi-chromate and tartar, small piece of ferrous sulphate added to dye bath when nearly boiled enough.

BLUE GUM BARK – LIGHT GREY

Mordant – Bi-chromate and ferrous sulphate added to dyebath.

LICHEN – DARK BROWN WOOL

7 ¼ ozs. wool, 8 ¼ ozs. Lichen, the flat back and grey kind.

Boil for two hours after bringing it gradually to boiling point, lichen and wool being laid in layers in dye bath.

LICHEN -- KHAKI

4ozs of wool boiled up in same dye as above for two hours.

LICHEN – TERRA COTTA

12ozs of wool

18ozs of lichen

Boil for about three hours.

It is always wise to make a test with a small quantity of wool before dyeing the whole amount but as you can never repeat the same shade in a second brew of dye - even when following the same recipe, It is as well to do all you require in one boiling.

A kerosene tin cut so that it rests on its side is a good vessel for dyeing, as it gives room for the wool to move freely during the process.

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