



by Connie Magoffin

Dye samples from fellow dyers are always welcome. The following samples arrived sometime during the past six months; perhaps they will motivate you to try a dye material you haven't used before. Sharing our experiences in dyeing can help us all to understand the process a bit more and thus, can add to our control of the results. Ethel Pettengill sent a lovely, soft yellow, handspun sample dyed with pomegranate. Following a recipe from Krochmal's *Complete Illustrated Book of Dyes from Natural Sources*, 3 pomegranates were chopped and boiled in ½ gallon of water for 20 minutes, then strained from the dye bath. To this ½ gallon of water was added and brought to a boil. Three-fourths cup of alum and one-fourth cup of cream of tartar were dissolved in the dyebath, 1 lb. of wet unmordanted wool was added, it was all boiled for 45 minutes and the wool was rinsed and dried. The color was supposed to be a yellow-orange. Ethel wondered what went wrong with her dye bath. I suspected, as did she, that the proportions should have been different. It's asking a lot of 3 little pomegranates to dye a whole lb. of wool. Ida Grae, in *Nature's Colors*, suggests using 4 fruits to 1 oz. of unmordanted wool to obtain a beige to apricot color by steeping all together for several days (no heating). She obtains browns and blacks by simmering a dye bath in an iron pot.

Natural dye recipes are difficult, as there are so many variables. Dye students are always concerned about how much dye material to use and I find that proportions of dye material to fiber dyed are extremely important. However, the dye potential of different dye materials is so variable that a general rule is impossible. One can't put onion skins and barks on the same "scale". Volume varies depending on whether you are measuring the dye material whole or in pieces. Both weight and volume are affected by the state of freshness, how much it has dehydrated. Each dyer has his favorite method; my dyeing procedure is as follows:

1. I always test a dye material myself. A recipe or sample from someone else may motivate me to try a new dye material, but I believe it when I do it, not when I read it or see it! I believe my own results when I can do it a second time!
2. I always test a dye material on a small amount of fiber (usually the five standard mordants plus an unmordanted sample) with a very large amount of dye material to see the fullest dye potential that the material has. I seldom follow quantities recommended in recipes; new procedures are valuable to note, however. It is so disappointing to dye a huge quantity of wool, expecting great colors that never appear (and it happens to all of us). I keep very careful records of proportions and procedures, then, if I want to duplicate a color I have obtained in the testing, I increase the dye material and the fiber amounts

proportionally. To obtain the same deep colors as in the testing, a large amount of dye material is required and there is usually a lot of dye left in the bath after the 1st dyeing. Rather than waste the remaining dye you can add more wool for a 2nd and a 3rd dyeing, etc., for lighter, yet related colors. Adding more wool to the 1st bath doesn't work, the resulting color is usually diluted.

Marge Manthei shared four dye experiments with us. With each dye six yarn samples were included, the five standard mordants and an unmordanted yarn. In all cases the unmordanted yarn was much lighter in color. Exact recipes were not included. Common Burdock, *Arc-tium minus*, (whole above ground plant, in bloom) produced a wide range of colors from light yellow-golds with alum, chrome and tin to beige and dark gray with copper and iron. Velvet Leaf, *Abutilon theophrasti*, (tender tips, before bloom) resulted in rich yellow-golds from alum, tin and chrome, a beige from copper and a warm brown from iron. Hemp, *Cannabis sativa*, (tender tops) produced a wonderful combination of colors. Alum and chrome gave very warm golds and with tin a distinct yellow-green cast was apparent. Copper gave beige and iron offered a chocolate brown. From Nettle, *Urtica dioica* (above ground plant) a nice range of more tan-golds and browns were obtained.

Kate Foreman sent along five different dye samples. One that I have never tried before is Virginia Creeper. Kate used 2 whole dried plants (not roots) simmered 1 hour to extract the dye. One-half lb. of alum-mordanted cheviot fleece was dyed in the bath for 1 hour and the result was a soft yellow-gold. Her avocado sample was a soft pink-beige. Six pits (frozen) were simmered for 3 hours. Two lbs. of alum-mordanted targhee fleece were added and dyed for 2 hours, then cooled in the bath for 48 hours.

Kate also sent 3 samples of dyes many of us use all the time. One and one-half to two pecks of fresh goldenrod blossoms were simmered for 2 hours to extract the dye and then 2 lbs. of alum-mordanted cheviot fleece was dyed in the bath for 1 hour to produce a warm rich gold. Four gallons of dried sumac berries were soaked for 24 hours and simmered 1 hour to extract the dye. Then 1 lb. of alum-mordanted cheviot fleece was entered and dyed for 1 hour. The result was a dark warm tan. Four gallons of dried marigold blossoms were simmered for 45 minutes and 1 lb. of cheviot fleece was dyed in the bath for 1 hour. The result was a wonderful bronze-gold. Because these are such standard dyestuffs we sometimes forget them in our search for exotic colors. They are old standards because they dye wool easily and they are quite fast and that's what it's all about, isn't it?

#### Guild Annual Membership

Individual.....	\$25.00
family.....	30.00
Retired.....	15.00
Sustaining.....	40.00 or more

Subscriptions to the *Minnesota Weaver* for persons living over 100 miles from the Guild) ... \$6 yr / outside U.S. \$7 yr.