# FROM WOODS & FIELDS

by Connie J. Magoffin

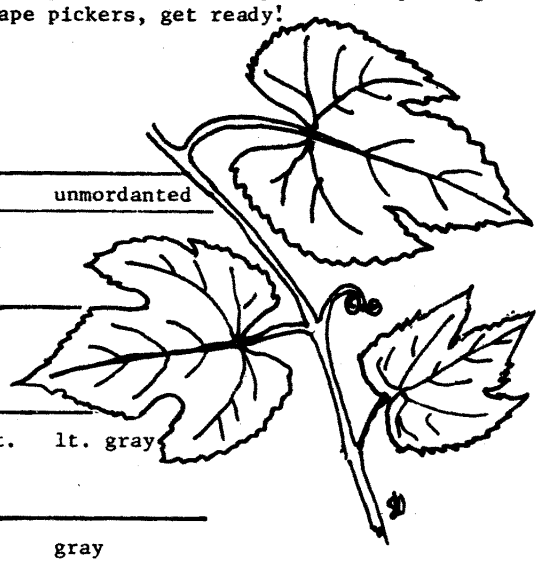
No matter how organized I promise myself I'm going to be each spring, in the fall of the year when a frost is threatening it's appearance, I find myself frantically grabbing handfuls I had wanted to test for color, for sure, this year. One of those "should haves" last fall was the blue cpncord-type grapes which have grown right outside my back door for the last three years. We have a small blue wine grape growing along our fence that is excellent for the tart grape jelly I prefer, so our concords are left for out-of-hand eating. They are the favorite snack for the kids and there are seldom any left below the four-foot level. The flavor seems even more wonderful after the first frost, if it is not a hard one, and thus, by the time all the other dye plants are gone I still have the grapes available (at least what few haven't been devoured).

Ida Grae (Nature's Colors) mentions three recipes using grape skins, each using the blue concord-type. She claims variations of blue color with each. I had tested wild grapes for dye during the first year that I had become involved with natural dyeing and my results were unspectacular. I shouldn't have let that prevent me from trying again, especially since I was at that time inexperienced. In the years since then I have noticed that edible fruits and vegetables are seldom terrific dyes (onion skins are one exception) and, therefore, grapes have not been on the top of my dye list. This fall, however, as I stood in the backyard, frost covering all other dye possibilities, I grabbed a few grapes and mumbled to myself, "Oh, why not!"

The dyepot was prepared exactly as Ida Grae suggests; I used the skins of 1 lb. of blue concord-type grapes (approximately 2 cups of grapes which results in about 4 oz. of skins). Although she recommends this amount for dyeing 1 oz. of chrome mordanted wool (1 lb. of skins for 1 lb. of wool), I used my usual test yarns consisting of 5 strands of yarn representing the 5 basic mordants and 1 unmordanted strand of yarn. I also threw in two small amounts of fleece that have been premordanted with tin and with chrome. The total weight only came to a little more than ¼ oz. (10 grams). The skins, water and wool were simmered for ½ hour and then left to cool overnight in the dyebath. The results were spectacular, especially on the tin mordanted fleece which was a beautiful, rich blue-violet color. (See chart for other results.)

I only had another 2 cups of grapes left and decided to save them for a demonstration I was giving for the Herb Society of Minnesota, keeping my fingers crossed that the results would be as exciting. For the demonstration that day I used some wool that I had premordanted over five years before. While fresh mordanting is best, I had used this wool with good results. As I handed out samples to the audience, we were all pleased; the skins of 2 cups of grapes had dyed 3 oz. of wool a beautiful soft, light blue, a lovely light purple, and a rich blue green (see chart). Ida Grae also achieved dark blues with copper and iron afterbaths on chrome mordanted wool.

You can bet I will be out there next year trying more experiments with grapes. In addition to trying the afterbaths Grae suggests for obtaining dark blue, I want to try other types of grapes besides the blue concord. I'd also like to try the cooked mass of skins and pulp that is left after extracting the juice for jelly. All the above experiments were done with the skins of fresh, uncooked grapes. By next month I hope my light tests on these dyed samples will be ready. Grae reports good fastness. Grape pickers, get ready!



| | alum | tin | copper | chrome | iron | unmordanted |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| mordanted yarns - 5 years old | lt. blue | dull lt. purple (blue cast) | | blue-green | | |
| small amounts of fleece | very lt. dull blue-green | medium blue-violet | | med. green (yellow cast) | | |
| test yarns /acid afterbath | green (blue cast) | dull blue-violet | tan (green cast) | medium green | dull lt. blue-green | lt. gray |
| test yarns /basic afterbath | | grayed blue-violet | lt. green-bronze | med. green (yellow cast) | dull blue-green | gray (green cast) |
| Ida Grae's results | | | | 1) dark greenish blue<br>2) dark blue (copper afterbath, ½ oz.)<br>3) dark blue (iron afterbath, pinch) | | |