



Recipe for Sumac Berry Dye

Gathering plant material:

On an October or November day, dress warmly and walk along either side of the Rideau River, where you will find many sumac shrubs growing close to the water. For a pot of dye, gather three handfuls of sumac berries in a paper or cloth bag. Remember to leave plenty of sumac berries for the birds to eat this winter!

Preparing the dye:

When inside, put the sumac berries in a medium-sized stainless-steel pot and cover with water. Place the pot on the stove and heat slowly – a gentle simmer works well. Over the course of an hour the water will begin to take on the colour of the sumac. The dye may vary in colour, ranging from a deep crimson to a reddish or light brown. If you are able, let the solution sit overnight without a heat source, as this will create a more vivid dye.

Once the dye is ready, separate the dye from the sumac plant material by using a colander over another pot or bowl. Return the strained dye to your cooking pot.

Textile choices:

If choosing to dye with 100 percent cotton or linen (plant fibres), the result will generally be lighter in colour, whereas with 100 percent silk or wool (animal fibres) the colours will be more vivid.

Whichever fibre is chosen, place it inside a container with water. Allow the fibre to fully absorb the water. A wet fibre will absorb the dye evenly, so leave it inside the container for at least 45 minutes.

Dyeing your textile:

Bring your dye to a simmer again. Once the dye is ready and the fibre is wet (see above), transfer the fibre to the dye pot. Keep the pot at a simmer for a good hour, occasionally stirring to ensure all parts of the fibre are submerged.

Turn off the heat source and leave the fibre in the warm solution overnight.

Next day, rinse your fibre gently in lukewarm water to wash out excess dye. If the fibre has obtained the desired colour, let it dry. The final colour will be lighter than when wet.

For a deeper colour, return the fibre to the dye pot and cook again following the above instructions. Start by wetting the fibre....