Natural Dyeing

The color of natural dyes depends on the season, cooking pot, mordant, fabric, duration, concentration, and numerous other factors! Just experiment and keep track of exactly what you do. If you happen onto a good “recipe,” repeat it. Just don’t be surprised if your results are different. Each time you try natural dyeing, you will invent a new color!

Materials:
- Garlic mustard leaves
- Knives and chopping blocks or scissors
- Large pots (2)
- Natural fibers or fabrics for dyeing (cotton, linen, wool)
- Aluminum potassium sulfate (alum)
- Hot plates (2), firepit, or stove

Directions:
1. Gather plant material for dyeing.
2. Make the dye solution. Chop plant material into small pieces and place in a pot. Add twice as much water as plant material. Bring to a boil, then simmer for about an hour. Strain.
4. Get the fabric ready for the dye bath so the color will set in the fabric.
   - Find the dry weight of the material to be dyed. Divide this weight by four, and weigh out that much alum mordant. Stir the mordant into the water.
   - Presoak the fabric 40 minutes in a separate bath of warm water.
   - Add the fabric to the water with alum and simmer for an hour (180° - 200° F).
   - Rinse the material and squeeze out excess. Rinse with cool water until the water runs clear.
5. Add the fabric to the dye. Simmer one hour, stirring occasionally for evenness of color.

Thanks to Marc Imlay of the Maryland Native Plant Society for these directions.

Other Non-native Dyes:
This recipe for garlic mustard yields a bright sap green color. Try purple loosestrife flowering shoots in full bloom for a purple, green, or black dye.