The quarterly newsletter of the Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild of the East Kingdom
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Mission Statement:
The goal of the Eastern Kingdom Herbalist's and Apothecaries' Guild is to encourage study, teaching and practice of medieval herb uses, as well as study of medieval apothecary and pharmacy practice, in the East Kingdom. The Guild should serve as a conduit for herbalists and apothecaries in the kingdom to communicate with and learn from each other, and to disseminate knowledge about medieval herbalism and pharmacy to others.

ti·sane ti-'zan, -'zän, n.

Etymology: Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin ptisana, from Greek ptisanE, literally, crushed barley, from ptissein to crush - Date: 14th century : an infusion (as of dried herbs) used as a beverage or for medicinal effects

HEADLINES

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From the Chronicler:

Welcome to our "Colorful Issue." Somewhat by accident, we found ourselves with a theme this time: natural dyeing.

From Carowyn to Myfanwy, from casual inquiry to scientific experimentation, there's a lot of room for playing around with natural dyes.

Does anyone else have a story to tell? A favorite book to recommend? (My own favorite is Ida Grae's *Nature's Colors*). An experiment to report on? Tell, tell!

YIS
Johanna

To get on our mailing list, e-mail to joanne@jafath.com or drop an old-fashioned note to the return address on the mailer.

If you are on line, join us on the sca-herbalist mailing list (go to www.yahoogroups.com/subscribe/sca-herbalist to sign up) or the East-specific EK-Herb (sign up from our website at www.eastkingdom.org/guilds/herb).

Do you have a favorite herb, gardening tip, historical tidbit, or recipe? Maybe a review of a book you think the world should share? That's perfect for this newsletter — send it to the Chronicler!

Dyeing Bone Beads — Adventures With Color!

by Carowyn Silveroak

So, you have those lovely packets filled with dyestuffs ... you know there's color in there, but you're not sure what to do with them? I was afraid to try dyeing too, until the day I just said "ah, what the hey, try it!" And I tossed the contents of a packet of saffron in simmering water, and COLOR appeared! And for many period dyestuffs, it's that simple!

This is my list of easy beginner dyes to try:

Cochineal (reds to purples)
Copper sulfate (green to turquoise blue)
Saffron (yellow)
Turmeric (different yellow)
Cinnamon (red-brown)
Rose Petals (rosy-brown)

I drink a lot of Snapple, so I keep a lot of well-washed bottles and caps handy. I also keep some cheap vinegar (the kind that comes in gallon bottles at the store), some cheap vodka (the cheap kind that also comes in gallon bottles), and some ammonia on hand.

When setting up a dye experiment, I grab three bottles. I peel the labels, then grab a Sharpie and write right on the bottle the information I'll need to know: dyestuff, liquid (tap water, vodka, or ammonia), and date. I'll pour an equal amount of dyestuffs into each bottle (it doesn't have to be exact, but it should be relatively close), pour in the appropriate liquid, stir with a plastic swizzle stick (a different one for each bottle), add the bone beads, then cap the bottles and put them in a dish tray (I get them cheap at the Dollar store) to prevent accidental spills, then I shove them in the back of a closet and forget about them for a year.

Vinegar as a dyebath is a bit different when dealing with bone beads. Pure vinegar will dissolve the calcium in the bone within a week, much less a month, so I'll take an old margarine container and toss in some beads, with enough vinegar to cover. After a half hour, I'll pull out the beads, rinse them well, and string them on three different strings, usually hemp. One strand gets put into each of the three previous bottles, to see if there's a difference in color.

Why different liquids? Because depending on which liquid you use, different dye molecules get pulled out of your dye stuff, and it gives you a different color. Sometimes it's the pH that's the factor, sometimes it's what dissolves the dye, most likely it's both of those plus a combination of other factors ... yes, it can get complicated very quickly, but we'll keep that for later! *gently shoos the chemistry professor back into the closet*

Cochineal (pH) and alkanet (molecule dissolution) are known for this — alkanet gives a lovely purple, but only if you use an alcohol liquid; using water will give you hardly any color at all. (And using rubbing alcohol versus vodka versus another type of alcohol like Everclear will also give you different colors!)

Keep a dye journal! If you get a really spiffy color that you'd like to duplicate, your notes will tell you what you did. Most of my bone beads go into small plastic bags, so I use the sharpie to transfer all the information from the bottle right onto the bag as well.

If you want to use water and heat it on the stove, that's fun too — just remember to keep adding water as it simmers off! I try to keep my dyebaths to a simmer or lower — only a few dyes can take boiling without destroying the dye molecules. I don't recommend simmering vinegar or ammonia or alcohol baths — the first two give off a lot of fumes, and the last one is very flammable! Putting those in glass or plastic bottles and setting them aside for months has proven less

smelly and volatile for me, and the longer the soaking in liquid, the better the color soaks into your beads.

The turquoise effect

I've found that putting the bone beads in a sealed plastic bag with no air after pulling them out of the copper sulfate bath turns them a beautiful turquoise blue. Now, how long this effect lasts after you finally pull them out of the bag ... no idea. But it looks great! But what if you want to dye something else, not bone beads? The bottles I use are pretty small, but still good for silk thread for embroidery, or wool thread for small weaving projects. Even bigger bottles, a gallon or half gallon, will work just fine. For larger bottles I definitely recommend the tubs, just in case the plastic bottle leaks. And you can cut the bottles apart at the end of the experiment to retrieve your colorful treasures!

Also, if you're looking for fun variants, the water you use will have an effect on your colors. Your tap water versus spring water versus deionized water versus rain water ... the possibilities are only limited by water sources! I usually snag a gallon of tap water at any event I'm at, and label the gallon where and when collected it. Yes, Pennsic water too, it gives everything a purple shade!

It's The Minerals

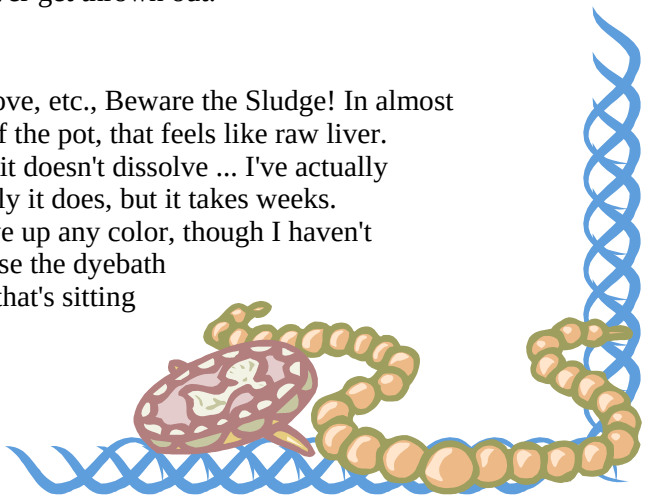
The minerals in the water are what affect your dyebath. Most minerals are mordants; they help the dye molecules hold onto your bone or fiber better. Tin will generally "brighten" a color, make it lighter and bolder. Copper and iron generally "sadden" a color, make it darker. Some people use chrome, and some don't — it really brightens a dye, but some don't like its potential toxicity. I don't use it, since it's out of period, and that avoids the argument altogether. Some don't use tin for the same reason, but only a pinch of tin is actually needed, and there is some intriguing evidence for it being used (possibly accidentally) in certain times and places in period — it's still being investigated, or I'd get more specific. I have some old tin cookie cutters that I boil in the water I'm going to use for the dyebath; that gives me enough of the mordant in my dyebath while not getting close to toxic levels, and I have bright shiny clean cookie cutters!

For copper and iron I have two jars with old copper piping in one and old iron nails in the other, with vinegar poured over both. Just one tablespoonful added to a medium pot is enough to change your color! With the exception of the copper sulfate, the dyes in the beginner's list above are food safe — but all my dye equipment is marked, and I don't use those pots or utensils for anything else. Once I'm done with the used bottles, they're rinsed and put into the recycling bucket. Most of my dyes are exhausted by the time I finally open a jar — all the color's soaked into the beads! I neutralize my ammonia dyebaths with vinegar, so they're neither too acidic or basic, and I pour the liquid part down the commode. And I rarely have to use the extra mordants, I usually let the water do its thing and then guess what may have been present to give me the colors. If there's still color in a dyebath, I save it and re-use it; if there's still some dyestuff left in the bottom that looks re-useable, I save it, dry it out, and use it again. I have cochineal that's been used five or six times, and alkanet that's been used eight or nine times. I've had dyebaths keep in the back of the fridge (properly marked!) for five and six years. Copper sulfate baths I just keep adding water and more copper sulfate, so they never get thrown out.

The sludge warning

If you use a powdered spice — cinnamon, turmeric, clove, etc., Beware the Sludge! In almost every liquid the powder forms a sludge at the bottom of the pot, that feels like raw liver. It's bizarre! And it clogs up everything it touches, and it doesn't dissolve ... I've actually poured it into soap molds to let it dry out, and eventually it does, but it takes weeks. It's the weirdest thing! And the sludge itself doesn't give up any color, though I haven't tried reconstituting the sludge into another dyebath. I use the dyebath above the sludge, and try my best to ignore the sludge that's sitting there blinking at me. (At least, I think it blinked ....)

Happy dyeing!



A Cautionary Tale

By Myfanwy Arionrhod
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Why, oh, why did I decide to dye with herbs and flowers? I've been interested in it for years, with The Dyer's Garden gathering dust on my bookshelf. This past autumn, I was overwhelmed by impulse. Such things rarely end well.

In my rather incomplete notes, there is first the mystery of the Rose mallow mirage. I cooked the flowers. I wrote it down. And then it all disappeared. I think mold may have played a role here, but we will never know.

Now you have to understand two things. I am perennially broke and I live in a house where, well, it wouldn't hurt to have a rope and someone to pull you back lest you get buried in the piles of stuff. I had great fun scavenging. So far as I know, the Cream of Tartar with the dust on it and the Alum that really is a plant additive were just fine, but the wool was strangely sticky after I cooked it. But I got over my Fear Of Mordants!

Energy and optimism was still high at this point. That poor, innocent, woman I was. Extensive scrubbing of table on back porch (oil, muck, don't look too closely). Scavenging and testing of camp stove. Organizing of stuff and setting up of dyeing station. Firmly separating dyeing equipment from cooking equipment.

And I *thought* I was paying attention to details. Watching the stove carefully when I'm first using it. Weeding the patio 'cause I didn't want to stray too far from the stove ... This didn't last. By the third or fourth dyebath, I was much more casual, rather like, I've been told, raising children.

But it's always the details that you don't pay attention to that get you. The local wool store bent over backwards skeining my sticky, not quite dry yarn. And much later I found out that processed wool is not supposed to be used (note to self — ask herbal list serve early next time — thank you, though). But I haven't dared tell them at the wool store!

Late September

Zinnia — much math, much furrowing of brows, worrying about blighted blossoms??? confusion over directions in book, as the directions for how much to use goes by plant, not by flowers ... Realizing that it takes a LOT of flowers to make a dyebath. Fortunately, zinnias and dahlias put up new flowers after the others have been picked ... first experience of bright colors fading to pale colors to a dyebath of ... tan. Trying to believe that it might be orange, but, no, it's tan ... Soaked it for four days, risked a moldy dyebath and it's still ... tan.

Dahlias — math calculations and storage in freezer, and yet more additions to the freezer. Those flowers are still down there, nearly a year later ...

Early October

Marigolds — somewhere between one and one third of plants. Simmered 3/4 of an hour. No wait, the fuel ran out sometime in the last 15 minutes. Luckily, looking back at the book, find that they are only supposed to be simmered for a half an hour so it's all good. Started out with gold and rust colored flowers, but have ... tan wool. Had simmered the flowers overnight? Two days later, now with fuel, simmered the marigolds in the dyebath. Nasty suspicion dawning. After fifteen minutes — tan. Let's be optimistic — golden tan. Really. If you look closely. Hopefully, if I leave it overnight, will turn into a more interesting color. Beginning to lose heart. Two days later, it does look a golden shade of tan. Oh, there's Mud in the water ... This cannot help

Basil Hoping for green! Anything but Tan! Two big plants cooked. After sitting overnight, to quote my journal "the dyebath is brown, boring brown. Gah!" So, in desperation, I'm added vinegar. Measure, nah, just slosh it in ... turned the bath to, you guessed it ... tan!

At this point I just gave up. I wrote hopefully in my journal of using turmeric, but my will was broken, my eagerness flown ...

Many months later, Lady Johanna hypothesized that it might have something to do with the mineral content of the water. Ours is very high, so .... it's always the detail you don't pay attention to.

But renewed and determined, once more into the breach I go! Stay tuned!

Bugle

~~*Lycopus virginicus, Lycopus uniflorus, Lycopus americanus*~~
Ajuga reptans, Ajuga pyramidalis, Ajuga chaemaepitys

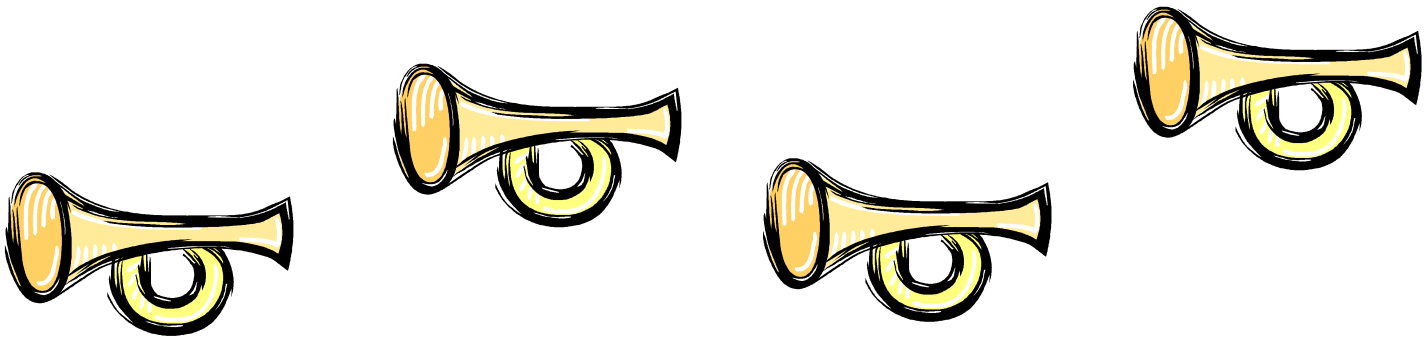
Carpenter's Herb, Sicklewort, Middle Comfrey, Bugula, Middle confound

Once again, linguistic confusion strikes. The "bugle" of our period is not the "bugleweed" of modern herb lore, which, as its Latin names indicate, is a New World plant. *Ajuga reptans*, known to us as a flowering ground cover, is the one we want. *A. pyramidalis*, which Mrs. Grieve describes as "a rare Highland species" and *A. Chaemaepitys*, (Yellow Bugle, Ground Pine) are related.

Ajuga, then, is closely related to Self-Heal, and like Self-Heal is one of the herbs for treating wounds. According to Culpeper,

> The Decoction of the Leavs and Flowers made in Wine and taken dissolveth the congeled Blood in those that are bruised inwardly by a fall or otherwise, and is very effectual for any inward wounds, Thrusts or Stabs in the Body or Bowels, and is an especial help in all Wound-drinks, and for those that are Liver-grown (as they cal it.) It is wonderful in curing all manner of Ulcers and Sores whether new and fresh, or old and inveterate, yea Gangrenes and Fistulaes also, if the Leavs bruised be aplied, or their Juyce used to wash and bath the places. And the same made into a Lotion with some Honey and Allum, cureth all sores of the Mouth or Gums be they never so foul, or of long continuance; and worketh no less powerfully and effectually for such Ulcers and Sores as happen in the secret parts of Men or Women: Being also taken inwardly, and outwardly applied, it helpeth those that have broken any Bone, or have any Member out of joynt. An Ointment made with the Leaves of Bugle, Scabious and Sanicle bruised and boyled in Hogs-Greas, until the Herbs be dry, and then strained forth into a Pot, for such occasions as shal require it is so singular good for all sorts of hurts in the Body, that non that know its usefulness will be without it.

A more modern assessment, from the Herbal PDR, allows as "unproven uses" that "Bugle is used internally as an astringent for inflammation of the mouth and larynx. It is also used for gallbladder and stomach disorders. Externally, the plant is used for the treatment of wounds. No health hazards or side effects are known . . ." On the other hand, it adds that no information is available as to its effects.



Save The Date

Coming in September:
2009

EKHAG returns to Maplewood Garden Club in
Settmore Swamp for a

HERB SYMPOSIUM!