

Adders are Amazing! Gwiberod Gwych!

# 24. NATURAL DYES

## INTRODUCTION

During Adders are Amazing! we worked with a local St Davids sewing group, The Stitchy Witches, and Women's Institute groups, to create a magical 'adder' quilt. Working with fabric artist Sian Lester, we spent two days creating naturally dyed fabrics from plants found in adder habitat. The process involved going out as a group to collect the plants from verges and hedgerows, and then returning to an indoor workshop session to extract the dyes, and prepare and dye the fabric pieces. This activity works wonderfully to bring people together; to help them consider the natural environment in which the adder lives; and to create something beautiful to celebrate and spread a positive adder message.

This activity sheet is a basic introduction to one of the techniques we used with birch leaves. Much more information is available online about natural dyes. More information on the other plants we used in the workshop are available from the ARG UK website [www.arguk.org](http://www.arguk.org) (see 'Materials and Resources').

## WHAT YOU NEED:

- Pieces of natural fabrics to dye (we used woven wool cloth and yarns as these take up natural dyes very well. Cotton can work well too)
- Birch leaves (200g for every 100g of fabric you wish to dye)
- Large stainless steel saucepan
- Cooker (we used counter-top hot plates and a mobile gas burner)
- Wooden spoon / tongs
- String, pegs, marbles, sewing needles and threads (for shubori method, if using)
- Water

## MAKE IT!

**1** Fabrics need to be pre-mordanted before dyeing with birch leaves, to allow the dye to take. Visit [www.wildcolours.co.uk](http://www.wildcolours.co.uk) to find out how to do this.

**2** Place birch leaves in dye pot (saucepan) with cold water to cover. Gradually increase temperature to boiling point. Simmer for 30 minutes. Leave to cool, preferably overnight.





## MAKE IT!

**3**

Shubori technique uses objects and stitching to 'resist' the dye and make patterns in the fabric. We used marbles wrapped in fabric, fastened with elastic bands, wooden pegs and sewed patterns.



**4**

Strain the dye liquid (remove leaves) and add fabric pieces to the pot. Raise temperature gradually to boiling over 45 minutes. Simmer for a further 45 minutes to develop a deeper colour. Periodically, turn fabrics gently with the wooden spoon – don't 'stir'. Leave fabrics to cool in pot before removing.



**5**

Unwrap the fabric pieces to reveal the shubori patterns! Rinse and wash with a little soap and rinse again.



**6**

Hang the fabric to dry, iron and use in a creative project.

