

THE EDIBLE GARDEN

APRIL 2018

DYES FROM THE KITCHEN GARDEN

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Until the middle of the 19th century, food and fabric dyes came exclusively from natural sources. Although they have been mostly replaced by synthetic substitutes, people still make and use natural dyes. It is a way of connecting with the past, usually a more environmentally-friendly, sustainable method of dyeing than regular chemical dyes, and there is the almost magical excitement of seeing chopped plants dye a wide range of rich, warm colours.

The first question most people ask is 'Can I dye with beets?' The answer is 'Yes, but the color isn't stable'. Most purples from berries and vegetables (from anthocyanin pigments) will fade to a dull brown or grey after washing. Save your beets, cabbage, blackberries, and blueberries for eating. Here are some other things you can get colours out of, without sacrificing the edible portion of the plant.

Onion skins: The papery brown or purple skins can be used to produce a range of colours that includes warm yellow, orange, brown, and olive green. I keep a crock in the kitchen to collect them in, ready for when they're wanted.

Blackberry canes: The arching purple canes of the blackberry/blackcap can be used to produce a deep rich grey with iron mordant (see procedure below). Since the old canes should be cut out after fruiting anyway, they might as well go in the dye pot, right?

Purple cornhusks: Some varieties of ornamental corn have deep burgundy stalks and husks. If you grow these, save some of the husks for dyeing. I've gotten colours ranging from pinkish-rust to blue-grey and soft green.

Bean plants, tomato plants, cucumber vines: Although I haven't tried these, other dyers have. Colours reported include yellows, tans, grey-brown, and grey-green.

Carrot tops and parsnip tops: Carrot tops (leaves) will give a clear primrose yellow, with a hint of green. Parsnip leaves are reported to give a duller yellow.

Black walnuts: The nuts are edible, although most people leave them to the squirrels. The green rind around the hard nuts, however, produces a lovely deep brown dye. It's very strong, and if you get the juice on your hands or clothes while making the dye, it will stain. The leaves produce a duller brown dye.

Marigolds: Flowers from both edible and ornamental marigolds produce strong colours, yellow from yellow flowers, darker from the darker colours, and a range of olive, rust and brown from frost-bitten flowers.

Rhubarb leaves: Produce a yellow-green.

Most natural dyes need a mordant or fixative in order to produce colours that will stay on fabric or yarn. These are usually metal salts. The most commonly used mordant is alum, available at bulk food stores and drugstores, as well as through dye suppliers. Iron mordant produces darker colours than alum, and is usually in the form of ferrous sulfate from a dye supplier, or as a rusty water solution.



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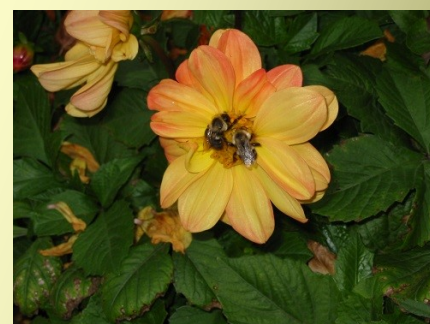
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BEE LINE IN PRAISE OF SINGLE BLOOMS

*Julianne Labreche
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If you want to attract bees to your garden,
then you need to start to think like a bee.



Bees on Dahlia
Edythe Falconer

The Honey Bee Research Centre at the University of Guelph does a lot of thinking of bees these days and so they are a useful source of advice for Ontario gardeners.

In their useful handout, *Creating a Bee-Friendly Garden* (easily downloaded at <http://www.uoguelph.ca/honeybee/documents/Bee-Garden-Brochure.pdf>), they offer several suggestions to create a home garden to attract bees. One suggestion is to choose single blooms rather than double blooms. This is because the showier blooms, often seen with new cultivars on the market, are not so easy for bees to access. The blooms are just too complex.



Left to right: black walnut/alum, blackberry canes/iron, onion/iron, onion/alum, carrot tops/alum.

Amanda Carrigan

Dyeing yarn or cloth:

***Safety note** – use separate pots and utensils for dyeing. Do not use pots you plan to cook food with again. I buy enamel or stainless steel pots second-hand for dyeing.

These instructions are for animal fibers such as wool. Cotton is harder to dye and uses a longer procedure. You can try dyeing cotton with this procedure, but don't expect colours to be as strong.

Weigh your yarn/cloth. Put it in a tub of warm water to soak.

Use a pot that is large enough to let the yarn move freely. Fill the pot with water and bring to a simmer. For each 100g (3.5 oz) yarn, stir in 1 tbsp alum and 1 tsp cream of tartar OR ½ tsp ferrous sulfate. Adjust as needed for yarn quantity desired. Wring out the yarn and stir it into the pot. Simmer 1 hour, and remove the yarn. You can dry and store the yarn at this stage or proceed to dyeing.

In a second pot, or the emptied pot from before: Take your chosen plant material and chop it up if needed. Chopping isn't necessary for things like onion skins or flowers or walnut hulls, but is good for vines and plants. Put at least the same weight of plant material in the pot as you have yarn. More is usually better. Fill the rest of the pot with water to cover the plant materials. Bring to a boil, and simmer for an hour or so. You want the dyebath to be strongly coloured and the plant parts to look well-cooked. Flowers usually need a shorter time, most other things can be cooked longer or even left to soak overnight in the pot after cooking.

Strain out the plant parts, and put dampened prepared wool into the dyebath. Simmer for an hour. Remove the yarn and rinse well (about 3 rinses) in water about the same temperature as the yarn. Abrupt temperature change can cause shrinkage and felting. Wring out and hang to dry. If there is still colour in the bath, you can add more yarn and do another simmer; this will probably give a lighter colour than the first round.

Most of the various baths and boiled plants can be disposed of on the compost pile after cooling. Liquids can go down the drain if you have no compost pile, or you can water plants with the dyebaths and rinse water.

If you want to explore natural dyeing further, I can recommend the following books:

- ◇ 'A Dyer's Garden' by Rita Buchanan
- ◇ 'Natural Dyes, Plants and Processes' by Rita Adrosko
- ◇ 'Craft of the Dyer' by Karen Leigh Casselman
- ◇ 'Indigo, Madder, and Marigold' by Trudy Van Stralen

Eco-printing is a form of natural dyeing where leaves, berries, bits of bark, roots, skins etc. are enclosed in layers of pre-mordanted cloth and immersed in a dye bath or steamed. The end result is a unique piece of fabric. Experimentation will show which materials produce colour fast prints.

Those large, showy blooms also typically produce little nectar or pollen. When it comes to a bee garden, single blooms are best. Even though those fancier, fussy flowers might be interesting for us as gardeners, they're not so intriguing for bees.

Here are some suggestions for single bloomed flowers to attract bees. Their flowers are not just easy to access but also provide bees with the pollen and nectar that they need to survive.

These flowers— purple, white, blue and yellow— are best seen by bees. Their fragrance attracts them too. Planted in clumps rather than single plants, they provide easy, one-stop shopping for bees, the gardener's ally as an important pollinator.

Crocus (*Crocus spp.*)- These are early spring flowers whose perfume attracts the hungry bees after the long winter months of hibernation. Crocus is planted in fall, about six to eight weeks before the first hard frost. Once established, they are easy to grow, naturalizing and coming back year after year.

Snowdrop (*Galanthus spp.*)- This is another early spring bulb that attracts hungry bees. This small plant has small, delicate flowers that hang downwards. They grow best in moist, cool, partially shaded areas of the garden. Their clumps grow rapidly and they should be divided every three to four years.

Cosmos (*Cosmos. bipinnatus*)- This easy-to-grow annual can be sown as seed once the soil warms in spring. It's a tall annual that blooms in mid-summer to fall, producing large, single blooms in white, pink, red or purple. Cosmos will grow in full sun or partial shade and is a native to North America and Mexico.

Christmas Rose (*Helleborus niger*)- This cold hardy shrub produces lovely single blooms, often in white. Unlike many flowers that attract bees, this one grows best in partial shade. Care needs to be taken however because it is toxic to both children and pets.

Flax (*Linum spp.*)- This delicate blue flowered perennial blooms over about twelve weeks from early to mid-summer. Flax requires well-drained soil and full sun. It is non-invasive and readily self-sows.

HORSING AROUND:

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

A pungent condiment, a wonderful accompaniment to roast beef, and the zing in a seafood sauce. That's horseradish. This perennial member of the cabbage family is almost too easy to grow at home, and once you've tried homegrown horseradish, you'll never go back to the store-bought version.

Horseradish will thrive in almost anything except waterlogged soil. It prefers sun but will take light shade. Choose a permanent site for it when planting, not too close to other plants. After all, you will be digging it up regularly to harvest the roots. It's a good idea to put barriers into the soil around your horseradish patch to keep it contained. Pieces of root broken off when digging can grow into new plants. Tilling or throwing horseradish pieces onto the compost pile can spread new plants around, so watch out. (My father's stock came from cut-off pieces that had been sitting on the compost pile for a week before he planted them.)

Horseradish is grown from plants or root cuttings, planted spring or fall. If you know someone growing it, get a piece from them. If not, look for roots or plants at farmer's markets, supermarkets, or nurseries. One or two plants is probably enough for most families. If you decide you need more, it's easy to increase your stock from cuttings. Once planted, horseradish needs little care except weeding.

Harvest horseradish in the fall, ideally after a frost. You can harvest a year after planting. Dig the roots carefully, and cut off the tops. Replant some tips of roots to replenish your stock for next year. Scrub the roots well.

Horseradish can be stored whole, wrapped in a perforated plastic bag in the fridge for a few months. You can also make horseradish sauce that will keep until next year's harvest. Caution: fresh horseradish is very strong, and the fumes can irritate your nose and eyes. You will want to work in a well-ventilated area, or outdoors if possible. Peel the root like a carrot, cut it into 1cm chunks, and drop it in a blender. Chop it in the blender with a small amount of water (1/4 cup for 7-10cm of root). Add 2-3 tbsp. vinegar and a little salt for each cup of horseradish. If you add it while blending, the result will be milder. For a stronger flavour, wait a few minutes after blending before adding the vinegar. Transfer to jars and store in the fridge.

I SAW

*Edythe Falconer
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

I saw with a Sear's Craftsman pruning saw that I have owned for at least 25 years – purchased with a lifetime warranty. During its career of heavy use it has been sharpened only twice and remains capable of cutting through a tree as thick as 7.5cm in diameter with relative ease. However I mostly use it for pruning currant bushes and other fruit bearing trees and shrubs. Unlike many newer pruning saws its teeth extend right to the end of its blade, a blade that is no more than 1/2 in/1.25cm in width. These features make it easier to get into narrow spaces. With a tool like this pruning is a pleasure. It folds for storage purposes although not as easily as it used to, and has a hole in one end for hanging purposes. On many occasions it has doubled as a regular saw on other types of wood.

In mid to late March I will be back outdoors, saw in hand, ready for some dormant pruning on my plants. Although we can't eat forsythias and lilacs I will persist in warning gardeners not to prune either of these in early spring. They both bloom on last year's wood.

Watch for *Trowel Talk* the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Lanark County Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners.

Pale Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*)

- While there are many new, showy cone-flowers for sale in garden centres these days, it is the old fashioned traditional pale purple ones that attract bees. This perennial also attracts other pollinators, including butterflies, and finches eat the seeds in winter.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*)-

There are hundreds of kinds of sunflowers. This annual is typically large and showy but there are also dwarf varieties. It's not only bees that are attracted to these big, single bloomed flowers. Butterflies visit these flowers too, and so do many birds that eat the seeds come late fall and winter.

Dahlia (single)(*Dahlia spp.*)-

These showy annuals may need staking. There are many different cultivars. The single flowered dahlias are best for bees, bearing daisy like blooms. Typically, they are grown from tuberous bulbs that are dug up in the fall and replanted in the spring.

Poppy (single)-

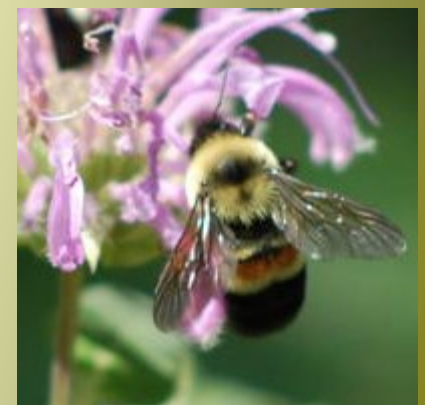
The cup-shaped Icelandic Poppy (*Papaver nudicaule*) is especially loved by the small bees that collect pollen in its stamens. It flowers in late spring to early summer.

Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)-

This is a bee magnet and a native North-American flowering plant that grows best in full sun. It will also attract butterflies and other pollinating insects. It is a tough, winter hardy plant, and a biennial plant that self seeds.

Aster (*Aster novi-angliae*)-

This is a tall, native wildflower, a single bloomed plant that blooms late in the gardening season. Its large blooms of blue, violet, white and pink provide a delicious end-of-season feast for the bees before winter.



Rusty patched bumble bee

Johanna James