

## NATURAL DYEING USING ONION SKINS

**This workshop will show you how to dye fabric or yarn using onion skins without the use of a 'mordant' (metal salt). (Natural dyes work best on natural fibres, especially wool & silk).**

### Materials

1. Dyestuff - dry onion skins from red or yellow onions,
2. Fibre - 100% wool or silk yarn or fabric,
3. Eco washing-up liquid (PH neutral)

### Equipment

1. Rubber gloves and apron
2. Plastic bucket
3. Weighing scales
4. Large old stainless steel pan
5. Wooden spoon or stirrer
6. Colander or sieve

### Method

1. Weigh your dry yarn, fabric or fibre then weigh out roughly the same weight of dry onion skins, which will be your 'dyestuff'.
  2. In a large pan soak your yarn or fibre in some hot simmering water with a tablespoon of eco washing-up liquid for 30 minutes. Try not to boil as this damages the fibres. This is known as 'scouring'. Rinse every trace of soap from the scoured fabric in lukewarm water three times at least.
  3. Make your 'dye-bath' by putting the dry onion skins into the clean large pan with plenty of simmering water for 30 - 60 minutes, stirring thoroughly every now and then.
  4. Strain the dye liquid from the onion skins making sure to keep the liquid! Dispose of the onion skins and add the rinsed fabric/yarn to the simmering dye-bath. Cook for 30 - 60 minutes, agitating gently and regularly.
  5. Rinse the dyed fabric/yarn with lukewarm water and a little eco washing-up liquid to remove excess dye. Dry and enjoy your beautiful naturally dyed materials!
1. Natural wool fleece 2. Soy bean yarn 3. Plain cotton 4. Calico 5. White linen  
6. Natural unbleached linen 7. Habotai silk 8. Silk noil 9. Bamboo & silk mix 10. Wool flannel



### Useful links/suppliers/books

George Weil - mordants, dyestuffs, materials: [www.georgeweil.com](http://www.georgeweil.com)  
Wild colours - mordants, dyestuffs, materials: [www.wildcolours.co.uk](http://www.wildcolours.co.uk)  
Jenny Dean's wild colour: [www.jennydean.co.uk](http://www.jennydean.co.uk)



## Designing a Sensibility for Sustainable Clothing



Fluff To Fibre





## S4S – DESIGNING A SENSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING

**‘S4S – Designing a Sensibility for Sustainable Clothing’** is a ground breaking collaborative research project funded by the **Arts and Humanities Research Council**. It is co-hosted by academics from the Department of Politics at the **University of Exeter’s** Environment and Sustainability Institute (ESI) in Penryn and the Fashion Department of the School of Art at the **University of Wolverhampton** in the West Midlands.

The **collaboration** has involved **community spaces, NGOs, local clothing brands, local designers and crafts people, film-makers and members of the public**. Between February and October 2018, it engaged **fifty members** of the public in **Cornwall** and the **West Midlands** in a series of **workshops** making fabric, and making, mending and modifying clothes.

A range of **innovative social science and arts methodologies** have been used to explore whether these **workshops** have **encouraged people to think, feel and act more sustainably in relation to clothing**. This set of leaflets shows a snapshot of the processes and outcomes from our **workshops**.

## FLUFF TO FIBRE

The Fluff to Fibre series demonstrated the journey that raw materials, such as wool, must take to become thread or yarn and then go on to become a fabric. All cloth begins life as a raw material whether we use ancient tools or modern machinery.

The Cornwall participants began this workshop series with a tour of the Launceston based wool mill, The Natural Fibre Company, which belongs to wool expert Sue Blacker. Sue also produces a range of knitting yarns under the name of Blacker Yarns. Here, the group saw how raw sheep fleece is sorted, graded then mechanically washed, carded, combed spun and dyed to produce beautiful woollen yarns for knitting or weaving.

In the next workshop, at St Gluvias Community Hall in the heart of Penryn, Audrey and Bob Durrant of Hawthorn Fibres shared their knowledge of raw fibres and hand spinning methods using both spinning wheels and drop-spindles. Their beautiful equipment infused the charming old ‘village hall’ venue with an ambience of nostalgia as everyone tried their hand at ‘teasing’, ‘carding’ and ‘rolling’ the raw fleece into the ‘rolags’. The ‘rolags’ were then hand-fed to the spinning wheel or drop spindle.

The following two workshops, hosted by Irene Griffin, who teaches about natural dyes at Falmouth University, taught the group how to prepare, extract and fix beautiful colours onto fabric and yarn using natural dyes from plants. Metal salts (‘mordants’) were used, which help bond the colours to the fibres and create a broad palette of shades on cloth. Depending on which metal salt and fibre combinations are used, a significant shift in hue can be achieved and further modified in after baths. For the final workshops in the series, Audrey and Bob Durrant from Hawthorn Fibres returned to deliver two concise but thorough introductions to weaving using basic, rigid heddle, 4 shaft table looms. Preparing or ‘dressing’ the loom with the warp is a fundamental stage, which can be time consuming for the beginner. To save time, Audrey and Bob had pre-warped their looms, but provided in-depth explanations of how to do this.

***‘I was amazed with the variety of textures you can get and also the different shades of colours you can get depending on the type of fibres you use as well. I think that’s really interesting.’***

Even from the start of the series, it was clear that the group’s perception of the value of cloth and clothing was beginning to change. They were able to learn the processes that raw textile materials, namely wool, go through to create a yarn that can be dyed and woven into fabric for garments. By seeing the stages that raw materials go through in the construction of spun yarn, there was unanimous surprise and amazement at just how many processes were required before even a single thread is created, let alone involved in constructing threads into cloth. This experience definitely provided a firm foundation of new understanding and appreciation of the multiple paths raw materials must travel to finally become clothing. The group were especially delighted to be able to dye some natural cream wool from the mill tour to weave into a single piece of cloth which was then sent to our co-participants in the West Midlands to create something. They embellished the cloth with crocheted flowers and turned it into a rather fetching clutch/shoulder bag.

[www.blackeryarns.co.uk](http://www.blackeryarns.co.uk)  
[www.hawthornfibres.co.uk](http://www.hawthornfibres.co.uk)

**Website:** [sites.exeter.ac.uk/s4s](https://sites.exeter.ac.uk/s4s) - **Twitter:** @S4sSensibility - **Instagram:** s4s\_sensibility - **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/S4sSensibility> - **S4S Shropshire and West Midlands:** <https://www.facebook.com/S4sStitchedup>