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Fabric dyeing: Blueberries

Introduction: As a kid it was installed in my brain that when eating a mango I needed to change into clothes that I wouldn't mind getting dirty/stained. The juices from that mango only looked like a dirty stain to me while growing up but I never correlated it with being looked at as a dye for fabric. Personally I know when eating a mango the juices have a yellow tint when stained on clothing. For this project I wanted to use a different fruit that I believe will have a much darker pigmentation, Blueberries!

History: I purchased my blueberries from Whole Foods. People have been using Blueberries as an inexpensive dye for years, started by Native Americans. Not only was it used as a dye for cloth and baskets but it was also used to accompany meals like stews and soup. When dried they can be used with meat to create Sautauthing or "beef jerky." The Blueberry plant did not go to waste, the Native Americans believed the leaves and roots were good for the blood so it was boiled and turned into tea. Symbolically Blueberries were called the Star Berries. "The blossom end of each berry, the calyx, forms the shape of a perfect five-pointed star; the elders of the tribe would tell of how the Great Spirit sent star berries to relieve the children's hunger during a famine." (James T Ehler date n/a). Blueberries can be turned to many different shades, "When used as a natural dye, blueberries create the most beautiful range of summery blues and purples, like the color of your favorite faded blue jeans. Hues range from periwinkle to pastel blue, magenta, and deep purple" (Bittner and Harampolis 2017).

Process: I will be using a cotton tank top for my Blueberry dye. The first step is to simmer 1-2 cups of water and $\frac{1}{2}$ salt. The salt will act as a mordant to help the fibers absorb most of the dye. Next I added my top to the water and let it sit for at least 30 mins then I rang it out once cooled to

the touch. (Salt water image below)



Next it was time for me to prepare my Blueberry dye, now in another pan I used 1 ½ cup of water and a half cup of blueberries and let it boil for an hour.



Before boiling



After boiling

After it boiled I emptied out the water and salt mix from the first pan and then banded my damp tank top to create a “scrunching” look to create contrast in the colors I then poured the dye into the



empty pan on top of the scrunched up tank top and let it simmer for an hour.



Scrunched up fabric

After the hour was up I turned off the heat, let it cool down for at least 15 minutes still in the dye then I rinsed it out until the water ran clear. I took off the rubber bands to reveal the finished



product

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Front of top

Findings: Looking at the finished product I feel like it came out AMAZING. I was not expecting it to look this good and now I'm considering doing this as a business haha. I am surprised at the color knowing that I used a blueberry, I assumed that the color would be a shade of dark blue depending on how much water I diluted the berries with. But to my surprise the color is Indigo, the website I used for directions did not have photos of the finished product but I feel like I followed the directions perfectly and this is what it's supposed to look like.

Conclusion: What I learned from this project is that I shouldn't look at juices from a fruit as a "stain" when on the shirt but rather as a dye. We are always surrounded by chemicals especially in the fashion industry. Yes it is much easier to go grab a fabric dye bottle instead but by using fruits you get to admire that something as small as blueberries can dye an entire shirt and feel satisfied that you created the dye yourself.

References:

James T Ehler (date n/a) Blueberry History, Foodreference.com

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OnlineFabricStore (23 June 2015) How to Dye Fabric- Low Water Immersion Technique, Youtube.

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