

Where are the avocados? Let's dyestuff

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This week's project consisted of learning how to naturally dye cellulosic textiles as well as how to resist dye. Starting off we were given a list which included what fruit and vegetable we would be able to use during our process of natural dyestuff. Dyestuff is a soluble substance used for staining or coloring. For this project a mordant will also be used such as vinegar, baking soda, iron etc. A mordant is a substance used to set dyes. We were able to pitch in our own ideas of other natural dyestuff we would be able to use if we had it stocked in our pantries. The second step to our project was experimenting with an ancient Japanese resist dye technique called Shibori. This technique was used in the 8th century by pleating and stitching fabrics in order to resist the dye in those areas similar to a tie dye effect. Throughout the project; we recorded the process by taking pictures of how we came about our fabric being dyed. Natural dyestuff dates back to 15,000 BCE which included ancient humans to dye their fabrics naturally as well as to paint their caves with these natural dyes.

For my project I decided to use avocado pits and skins in order to get my cotton t-shirt a dull pink color. Getting ahold of avocados at home wasn't a problem and as I explained to my family what I would be using them for, they would save the pits and skins in a small tupperware. Naturally dyeing is a time consuming process that should get full attention as well as doing background research before the project is started. This project is also very time consuming and dyeing can take up to 48 hours depending on the person's preference of color and how deep or vibrant they want their fabric dyed.

Looking up the history of the natural dye I used was difficult. I did background research on avocados and where they came from and I was able to gather information from there. Avocados were used and found in modern day Mexico which was back then taken over by the

Aztecs. It seems like natural dyeing with avocados could have come from there since that's where it was mainly found. The colors produced by avocado pits and skins are shades of pink which can go from a light pink to more of a mauve color. Avocados were inexpensive then because they were growing in these places where people didn't have to buy them. Food was able to be made and the skins and pits were preserved for dyeing. As for sumptuary laws of the royals I wasn't able to find much information on that and how symbolic avocados were back then.

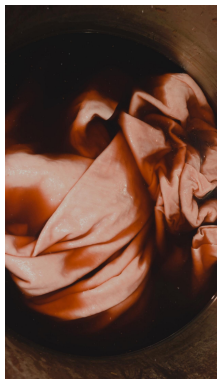
Starting my natural dyeing I began by watching a tutorial on how to naturally dye fabrics with avocados pits and skins. It was straightforward and informative so I didn't have a problem understanding how to form my dyestuff. I initially wanted to use turmeric for this process since it gives off a beautiful vibrant yellow (which is my favorite color), but because I was dyeing a shirt that wasn't mine I had to choose a color the person would like and wear. I decided to use avocado pits and skins for my project as I think the color is beautiful and since it's somewhat of a dull pink it's good for everyday use.

I began by collecting the skins and pits of avocados. Luckily my uncle who is an essential worker was able to buy avocados, he would bring about six avocados and I would be able to use them. I patiently waited for my family to eat the avocados so I could begin my dye project and right when I had about four to five avocados my father thoughtfully threw them out thinking it was garbage. I had to go digging in the trash in order to get those pits back. I was able to start my project right on the fifth day of collecting the avocado skins and pits. Luckily my family used an old pot for some at home remedies which meant I was able to use a pot that wasn't going to be used to cook food. I filled the pot with water about halfway and added the pits and skins. I turned the stove on to medium heat and began to boil the water.



Pot of water and the avocado pits and skin

As I let the water boil I soaked my cotton t-shirt in some lukewarm water for the remainder of the time I had to let the pot boil. After I had put in the avocado pit and skins and let it simmer for about twenty minutes I added baking soda as a mordant to the pot and let it boil for about an hour and then let it simmer again for another ten minutes. I took the pot off the stove and submerged the t-shirt in the dyestuff without resisting it or folding the t-shirt because initially I wanted to dye it two colors. I let the shirt sit in the hot dye for about a little over twenty four hours.



T-shirt submerged in natural dye

I was able to start the second dye that I would use for the shibori technique and this time I used hibiscus dried flowers with vinegar as the mordant. I was able to find some left over from a time we made hibiscus water which is a drink from Mexico. As I poured the hibiscus in the water instantly turned a light reddish color. I was excited to see how my project would turn out and if the hibiscus would be able to penetrate itself into the avocado dye.



Pot of hibiscus dried flower

After I let that boil and set I took out my t-shirt from the other pot and began to wash the rest of the dye off. I did this about four times until the water was clear. The rest of the water was used for the plants and weeds I have in my backyard which casually grow whenever and since it's a natural dye it won't harm the environment.



Washing off the rest of the dye to start resisting

After I washed all the dye off I began by pleating the t-shirt back and forth with a technique called accordion folding. I folded the t-shirt into a square and placed two sheets of cardboard on either side to cover up where I wanted the resist to occur. I secured it with 3 elastics going horizontal and vertical of the square and placed it into the pot of hibiscus flower dye.



Resist dyeing with Hibiscus dried flower

I waited about twenty four hours to let the dye really soak in and figured that maybe I have left the t-shirt in for too long in the avocado dye. I was seeing a resist pattern but once I washed it out after twenty four hours the color of the hibiscus had faded away. I think where I went wrong was adding too much water to a small amount of hibiscus flower and thus causing my dye to not be as vibrant. Once it dried the color wasn't visible and the t-shirt looked the same as it did the first time. I resist dyed again with a smaller cotton shirt and submerged it into the avocado pit and skin dye and got this beautiful pattern which I enjoyed looking at. I gifted the small shirt to my cousin (she wore it the entire day and seemed really happy when I gave it to her.) The other shirt was just fully dyed with the avocado color and it turned out beautiful (I had my cousin bring me three shirts of hers all white to dye different colors.) I'm impressed by how nicely the avocado dyed. I didn't throw away any dye because it will be used for future projects.



Both shirts side by side. One with a failed shibori technique the other with a successful resist dye pattern.



My cousin is wearing the avocado pits and skins shirt with a successful resist dye.

What I found out during this process is that if you are collecting avocado pits and skins you have to make sure they are thoroughly clean and if you are able to freeze them. I made the mistake of leaving them unwashed and in an area where the temperature isn't anywhere near freezing. Once I started my project some of the skins were moldy so I didn't use those and other areas still had some flesh. I might have also added too much of the baking soda because the color was deeper than the ones I've seen in other tutorials. My process didn't turn out the way I expected it too but I can always try it again in the future and see if it works. I was pleased with the outcome, it just wasn't what I expected.

My process was overall great. I think this was a great way to show off particular skills that not many people are willing to do. It helped me learn a new way to tie dye without using harmful chemicals in the clothes we wear. My first attempt might have been a fail, but I did succeed the second time. I'm excited to continue this project outside of school work so everyone can have beautifully dyed shirts made by me. I already have three shirts I can play around with so I will be able to conclude and see if I was able to learn from past mistakes.

Citations

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