



# Dye Guide

AN INTRODUCTION  
HOW TO PAINT FLOWERS  
WITH NATURAL COLOURS

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WOOL + NATURE



There are always  
flowers  
for those  
who seek them

HENRI MATISSE





## VISUAL MEMORIES

As an illustrator I work with colour every day and I was curious to explore the colour world of natural dyeing. Guided by intuition and playfulness, I was looking for a way how I could incorporate illustration in the world of natural colours and textiles.

Natural dyeing is a way to express my art, intuitively learning about this medium as I go. It is a tool for a creative expression as an illustrator and to make visual memories of the nature that surrounds my daily life. I work with intention and let the magic of the natural dyes happen before my eyes.

My inspiration comes from my life, from exploring my home here in the mountains, walking our dog in the ancient forests. A bird on a tree branch. Some wild flowers. Our summer garden. The night sky. I love where we live, and how nature that is right outside our doorstep continues to inspire me. I want to express that in my work.

I am so happy to share this natural dye journey with you! If you've been curious how to create botanical illustrations on fabric using natural colours, this guide is a wonderful introduction.

With love, from Wool + Nature  
x Claire



SCOTCH BROOM GIVES GORGEOUS YELLOW COLOURS



## TOOLS TO USE

At my atelier I don't have that many tools. When I first started dyeing I found some basic tools in my kitchen. Over the years I mostly thrifted tools to make my daily practice a bit easier.

I recommend you use whatever tools are easiest for you to obtain. Use these tools only for your natural dyeing practice.

**Cellulose fabrics.** My personal choice is linen. I love the rustic feel of the fabric that becomes more and more beautiful over time. A mid-weight cotton also works great.

**Whisk.** Or a spoon or something to mix the mordant paste and to get out all of the lumps.

**Kitchen scale.** Digital scales are inexpensive, easy to use and most accurate.

**Marmelade jars.** You can use old jam jars for mixing the mordants. I use a separate jar for the bright and dark mordant.

**Tape.** You need your fabric to be as flat as possible. You can either use pins or tape to hold your work in place.

**Brushes.** I have a small collection of different size brushes.

**Propane stove or hotplate.** A propane stove or electric plate heats water for scouring, extracting dye material and dyeing fabrics.

**Stainless steel pans.** Choose for a pan that is stainless steel and is large enough for your fabrics to move around freely.

**Wooden spoons.** I like to have different wooden spoons that I have collected over the years.

**Mask.** I always wear a mask and have a window open for some fresh air while I prepare my mordants or dye. So during the day I can take little breaks and listen to the birds singing and the sheep bells far away in the mountains.

#### INGREDIENTS

Distilled white vinegar (vinegar)

Soda ash

Aluminum sulfate (alum)

Ferrous sulfate (iron)

Guar gum

Wheat bran

Calcium carbonate (chalk)

Eco-friendly pH-neutral soap

Dye material of your choice

SUN DYED WITH WELD (RIGHT PAGE)



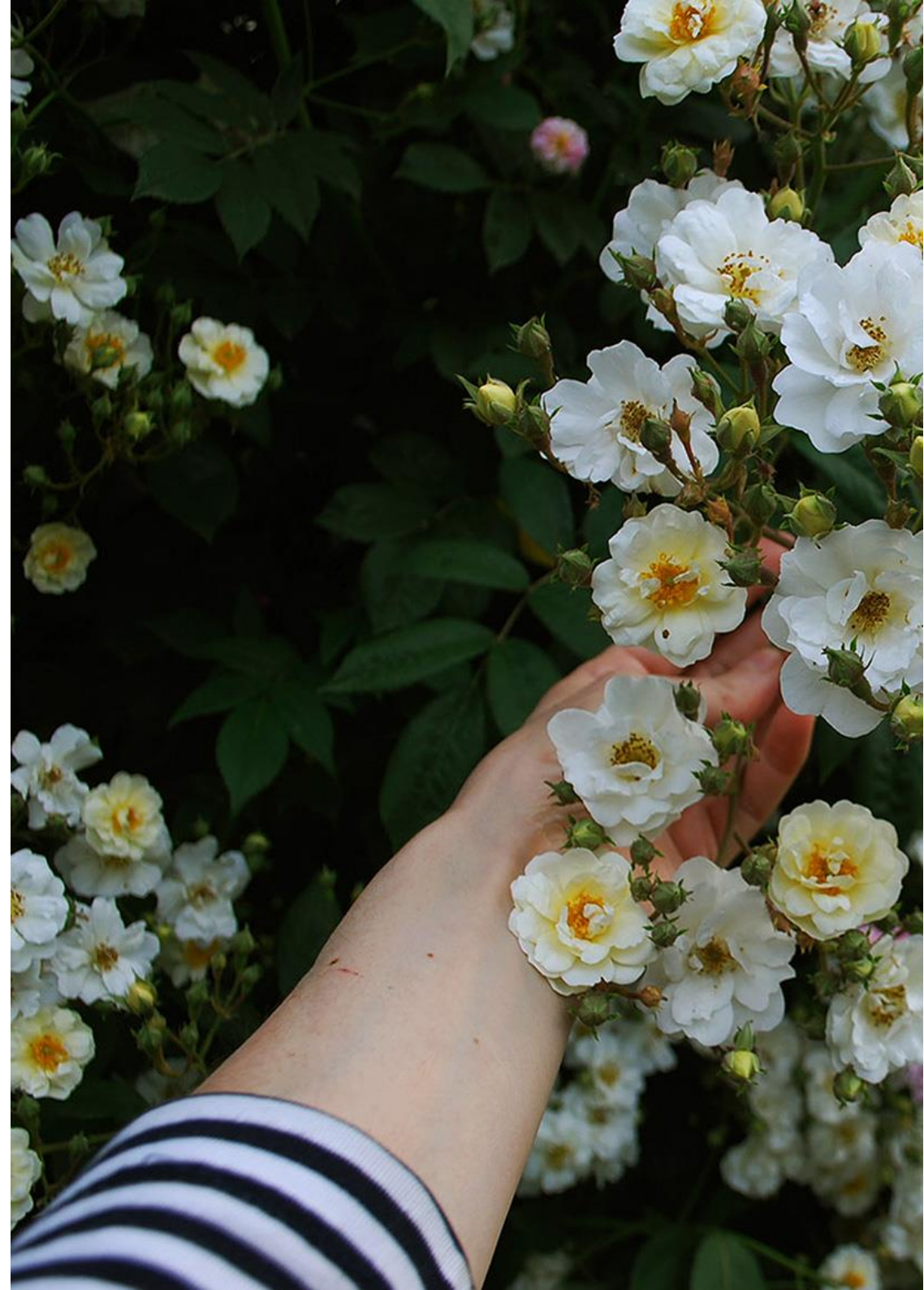


USE RED AND YELLOW ONION SKINS FOR BEAUTIFUL GOLDEN YELLOW COLOURS

## PREPARING YOUR FABRIC

Before you can paint onto your fabric, it needs to be scoured. Residual starch needs to be washed out at a high temperature in order to dye your fabric successfully.

1. Heat a pan of water until boiling.
2. Add 1 tablespoon of pH-neutral soap and 1 tablespoon of washing soda.
3. Boil the fabric for at least 2 hours until the water is yellow.
4. Rinse thoroughly and let dry completely.





The notebook is open on a wooden surface. The left page features a light-colored fabric swatch with yellow and orange circular patterns. A white card is placed over it with the title 'BRIGHT MORDANT' and a list of ingredients. The right page features a plain tan fabric swatch. A white card is placed over it with the title 'DARK MORDANT' and a list of ingredients. Dried orange flowers are scattered around the notebook, and a large orange flower is in the top left corner.

## BRIGHT MORDANT

100 g Vinegar  
10 g alum  
5 g soda ash  
1 g guar gum

## DARK MORDANT

100 g Vinegar  
4 g iron  
2 g soda ash  
1 g guar gum



## RECIPE

After years of trying out different recipes and techniques, I finally settled on this particular one and made it my own.

These two mordants can be blended to create any tone between them on the spectrum. For a good middle blend use one part by weight each. I recommend making and using them on the same day.

### BRIGHT MORDANT

100 g vinegar  
10 g alum  
5 g soda ash  
1 g guar gum

### DARK MORDANT

100 g vinegar  
4 g iron  
2 g soda ash  
1 g guar gum

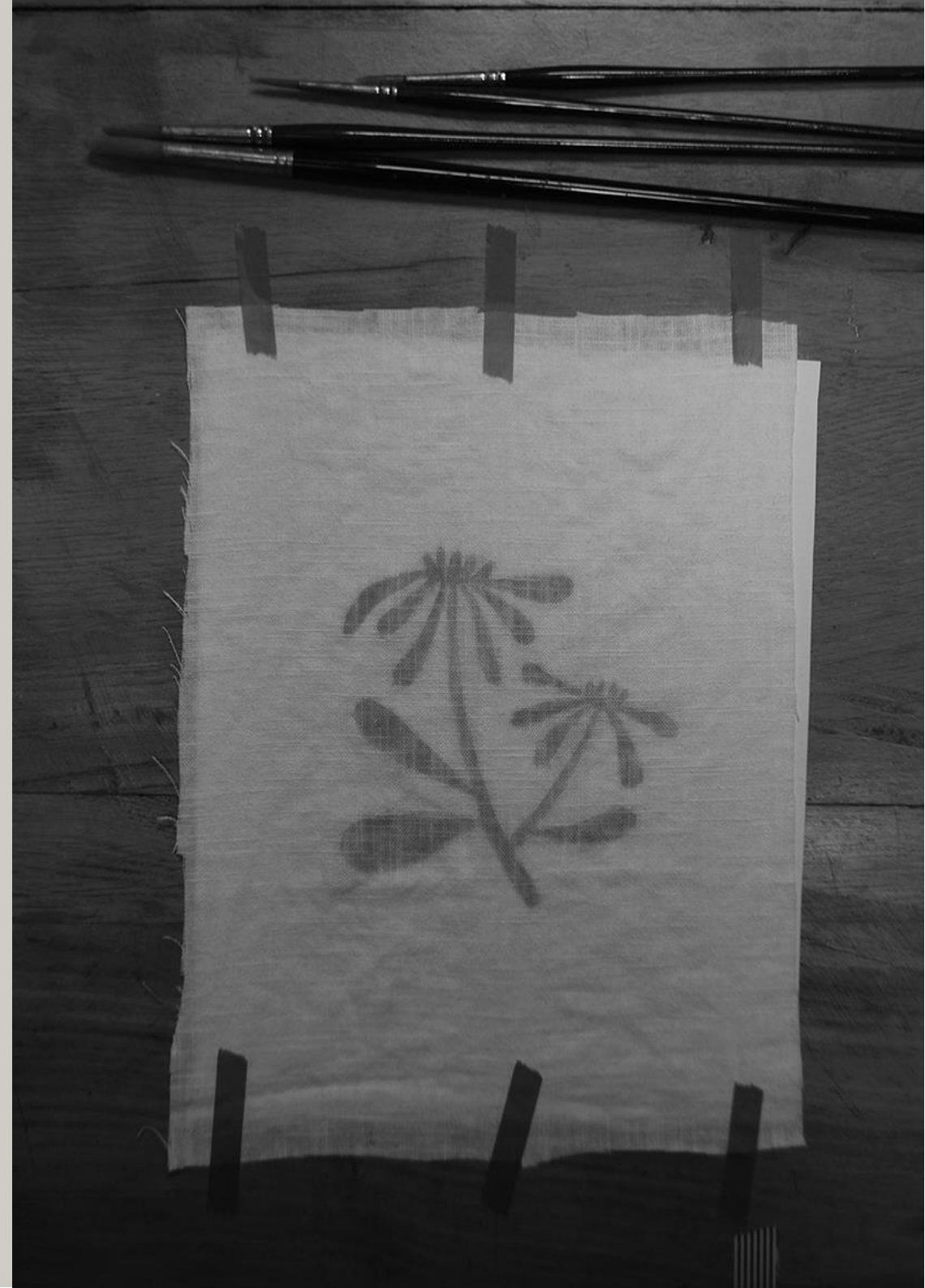
1. Measure vinegar into a jam jar.
2. Add alum or iron to the vinegar.
3. Carefully add the soda ash to the vinegar because it can cause foam. Wait until all the bubbling is done and the soda ash is fully dissolved.
4. Add the guar gum.

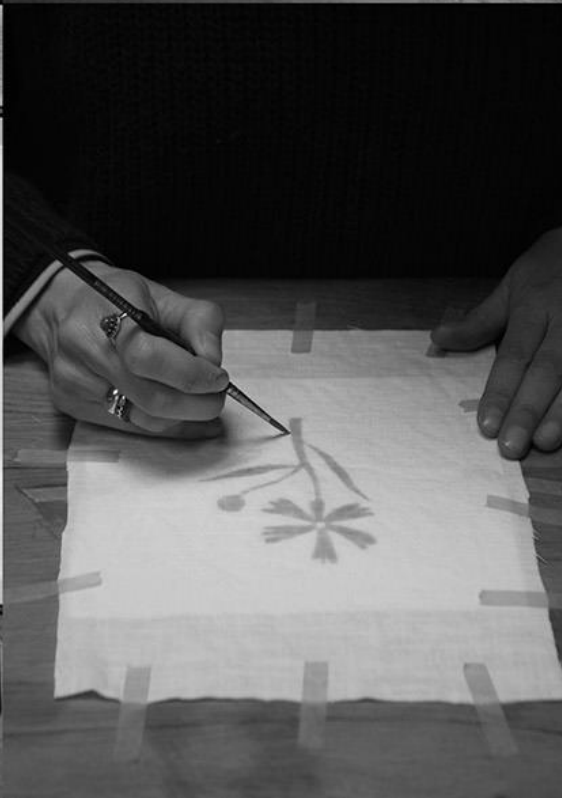


## PAINTING

You can make your own illustration or choose one of the botanical illustrations I made for this guide. On the dye guide page on my website you can find different templates to download.

1. Create a work space for yourself by taping the template with the botanical illustration onto the table.
2. Tape a piece of fabric without any creases on top of the template.
3. Choose which mordant you like to work with. The bright mordant will give you lovely sunny shades, the dark mordant will deepen the colours.
4. Work slowly and make small strokes in the direction of the brush hairs.
5. Once your fabric has been painted, it needs to dry for 24 hours.







## FIXING

This next step in the process will bond the mordant to the fabric and helps to dissolve the excess guar gum that is still on the piece.

1. Make a warm bath and add 1 tablespoon of chalk.
2. Put 3 tablespoons of wheat bran to a muslin bag and add to the bath.
3. Rinse your pieces in this solution and let them sit for about 5 minutes.
4. Rinse and start dyeing or let it dry for later.





FOREGING ST JOHN'S WORT FOR BRIGHT YELLOW COLOURS



## DYEING

For this dye guide I use cosmos flowers, but you can use other plant material. Throughout this guide I share other yellow colours to naturally dye with.

The cosmos flowers give rich colours which remind me of long summer evenings in our garden. I am so delighted with the rich oranges and deep browns that these happy flowers give.

1. Add the cosmos flowers to a pan of water.
2. Bring the pan to a boil, then turn down to a simmer.
3. Simmer the flowers for at least 30 minutes to 1 hour, adding water if needed.
4. Try to extract as much colour from the flowers as possible.
5. When you feel there is enough extract from the flowers, you strain out the flowers.
6. Add your wet and fixed fabric to the pan and let this simmer until it has the desired depth of shade. With time the hand painted flower slowly takes more and more colour.
7. Take out the fabric and rinse any excess dye under running water. Hang to dry out of the sun.





MERCI!

Thank you everyone for following along and for your kind support that allows me to pursue what I love the most. Hopefully this dye guide will become a part of your creative life. I would love to see what you make!



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