

Dyeing with Pokeweed

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A botanical book says that Pokeweed's Latin name is *Pyrola americana*, its Italian name *Cremesina uva turca*, and that it is used for dyeing. This plant is poisonous when its stems are pink, about September and October when it has clusters of black berries. The berries dye strongly so no mordant is needed. Results are to some extent unpredictable and rinsing can be very problematic* but I found its use worthwhile in wool yarn, also perhaps, wool felt. With silk and cotton, results were not worth having.

As the berries are poisonous I harvested them with gloves (in case that was necessary) eight oz. is plenty for a small quantity of wool yarn. The second time I dyed with pokeweed I used one and one-half pounds as follows:

The berries were boiled in water for a short time, (they soon boil over). They were then squashed/pounded and sieved/filtered. Water was added. Over a low heat wool yarn was added. The first yarn should only be left in a short time, 5-10 minutes, or less. It immediately becomes a bright vermilion. Squeeze between finger and thumb (gloved) to get an idea of what rinsed color will be. You want the rinsed color to be orange at the most, not red, or rinsing will be a problem.

The second yarn I put in was pale lemon (from saffron) and became pink in five minutes and was removed. The third yarn became a beautiful peach. The fourth yarn was left in 20 minutes and became orange. The fifth yarn was pale yellow. For the sixth yarn, I added fresh berries first - as I wanted more orange but it was only mustard-brown.

* Problematic rinsing.- Red yarn was rinsed till the water was clear then hung to dry. It dripped red. I rinsed again till clear, hung it to dry, again it dripped red. I soaked it overnight, rinsed it clear, hung it to dry, and again it dripped red and on until the fourth day when I had orange yarn which dripped clear.