



NATURE PROVIDES DYES FOR RAINBOWS: A WORKSHOP APPROACH by Carol Leigh Brack-Kaiser.
*Hillcreek Fiber Studio, 7001 South Hill Creek Road,
Columbia, Missouri 65203. 2016. Softcover. 176 pages. \$39.95.*

Nature Provides Dyes For Rainbows introduces the dyes and dye processes for a true rainbow of natural dye colors. The book is separated into three different workshop sections: Missouri Dye Plants, Ancient Dyes (historical dyes used in the United States), and Lesser Known Ancient Dyes (traditional dyes used in other countries). Approximately twenty-four color samples are shown for each dye. Cotton muslin, raw silk fabric, and wool roving are mordanted with alum acetate and chrome. After-baths of tin, copper, and iron are applied to each material and are photographed along with a control set. The primary audience for this book is someone with previous dyeing experience who wants to explore natural dyeing more in depth or who wants to lead a workshop.

Carol Leigh Brack-Kaiser will be familiar to many as the owner of Hillcreek Fiber Studio. She teaches dye workshops in Missouri and has taught at John C. Campbell Folk School as well as privately. Throughout her career she has continued to take classes with masters in the dye field and conduct her own research into historical and regional American dyes.

Nature Provides Dyes For Rainbows is self-published and would have benefited from editing for presentation and attention to detail. Handwritten labels and stapled fabrics make the photographs look less professional than many other dye books. Since this book has a lot of substance, it would be unfortunate if its presentation caused it to be overlooked.

One substantial criticism of this book is its stance on mordant and dye ingredient safety. Brack-Kaiser states that “anything, even water and spinach, can be toxic if consumed in too large a quantity” and that, essentially, if we do not drink the mordant water we will be fine. Making statements such as, “mordant salts come in crystal form, so there’s no powder to contaminate our lungs” and using photos of hands dyed blue from indigo and woad vats made with Thiox, lye, zinc, lime, and sulfuric acid negates the importance of good studio practice, which is to use eye protection, a dust mask, and gloves as necessary when coming into contact with chemicals.

Despite some drawbacks, this book is rich with information. Brack-Kaiser cites numerous resources and provides the reader with direct channels for further exploration. Important details such as optimal temperature for a dye color or the effect of an acid or alkali added to the dye bath, frequently omitted from natural dye books, are given. As well as including a comprehensive bibliography, after each Ancient Dyes section the author supplies suggested reading resources broken down by dye. In addition to the dyes that can be ordered online, Brack-Kaiser includes regional plants, some of which are uncommon even for natural dyers. These have to be collected and processed by the dyer, but some of the colors are so stunning it might be worth a road trip to find them!

*Reviewed by Janet Ruhan
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