

Smiling Dog Farm Plants for Natural Dyeing

2021

Black Dye Sunflower (Hopi) - annual

Another beautiful sunflower with multiple uses, Hopi Black Dye Sunflower is traditionally grown and used by the Hopi Native American people for dyeing cotton, wool and other fibers. Tall plants (reaching 8' or more) with medium to large sunflower heads look striking in the garden, and can be used as cut flowers too. The seeds are used for dyeing; they are shiny black and are edible too. Dye preparation is quite simple and the colors will vary from grey to deep purple (almost black) depending on the technique and other materials used.

Cosmos (Sunrise) (*Cosmos bipinnatus*) - annual

Cosmos is always a lovely plant for the garden border. Even if you aren't going to use it for dyeing, the variety Sunrise will be welcome in your garden. This plant is prolific, with hundreds of blossoms in yellow and orange colors growing on large (4-6') bushy plants. The flowers are used for dyeing; they will yield a yellow color.

Dyer's Chamomile (*Cota tinctoria*) - perennial

An easy to grow plant that tolerates a wide range of soil conditions, Dyer's Chamomile blooms heavily, with flowers of 1-2" that are used for yellow dye. Dyer's Chamomile will develop enough flowers to use the first year. Cut the plants back hard with the first flush of flowers when just opened and the plant should produce a second flush later in the summer. If growing more than one plant, space them about 12" apart; plants are about 3 feet high. You can also dry the flowers for dyeing later.

Hopi Red Dye Amaranth (*Amaranthus cruentas* x *A. powelli*) - annual

Here is a truly multi-purpose plant. Amaranth is beautiful in your garden, is attractive to pollinators, and is so versatile. The leaves and seeds are edible, and can be used for dyeing fiber as well. When used for dyeing wool, Red Dye Amaranth will yield yellows and orange colors. Use the immature leaves in salads or as decorative toppings; and the seeds are edible too. The flowers are also beautiful in cut flower arrangements.

Japanese Indigo (*Persicaria tinctoria*) - perennial

Indigo is the classic plant dye for shades of beautiful blue. Plants will yield throughout the growing season - cut the leaves to use as you go along and more will be produced for use later on. So diverse, with many shades of color being possible depending on your preparation methods. Indigo is undoubtedly the most popular dye-it-yourself plant.

Madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) - perennial

One of the very few plants that will give you red pigment, madder is a must in any dyer's garden. Madder is a perennial and will require at least a couple of years before you can harvest it. Plants are rather large (up to 5 feet) and grow as a vine, so will benefit from a support of some type. Keep madder plants mulched to suppress weeds. Madder plants have small hairs that enable them to hold on to their supports; these hairs may be itchy on your skin if you handle the plant. Wait until the plant is mature (at least 2 years) to harvest the roots, which are used to produce the dye pigment. Madder is a lovely addition to the garden and attracts pollinators.

Weld (Dyer's Rocket) (*Reseda luteola*) - biennial

Weld, also called Dyer's Rocket, is a biennial plant that produces a yellow dye. The flowers form in the second year. Weld looks beautiful in your garden and attracts pollinators. The first year rosettes that are formed during the plant's first year can be used for dyeing or wait until the second year and harvest the flowering stalks to use fresh or dried. Plant weld plants while still fairly small so as not to disturb the taproot. If planting several plants, place them about 1-2 feet apart, since the blooms are large.

Scabiosa (Black Knight) - (*Scabiosa atropurpurea*) - annual

Scabiosa is also known as the pincushion flower. The variety Black Knight has attractive dark blooms on long, straight stems; the anthers are a lovely contrasting lavender color. Scabiosa flowers can be used fresh or dried for natural dyeing. A variety of colors can be produced during the dyeing process, depending on the mordant and acidity of the dye bath. Black Knight will produce blueish-green, purple, and pink dyes. Harvest fresh flowers before they start to die back, and the plants will keep producing new flowers. Black Knight is versatile for use as a dye plant - if you can't process and use the fresh flowers, harvest and dry them for use later.