

Bundle dying

This activity helps children understand that we can get colors from plants.

When each child in the class selects a different plant, we can see and record which plants in their neighborhood make which color. It's an easy process that doesn't require creating big vats of dye, and can mostly be done with materials found in the home. In the absence of a garden or old bunch of flowers, just look to your kitchen: onion skins, red cabbage, bay leaves and [avocado peel](#) each have a hue to contribute to your creations. Here's my step-by-step guide to trying the technique





The technique works by creating imprints of flowers, petals, leaves, herbs and vegetables onto a sample of natural fabric.

You are going to take a scientific as well as an artistic approach to this project. There is a template to be filled in as you progress through the steps.

First collect all the materials needed.

Then take a walk in nature and collect an assortment of botanical bits. E.g. leaves, bark, flowers and seeds.

This is also a chance to really relish the spectrum of different hues that the natural world offers up.

The list here is just for your reference.

Get a piece of cotton fabric that has been washed and mordanted and string to tie it. You will need to find a stick and some plastic (20x20cm) to wrap the plant and fabric.

When you have made your bundle, steam it for two hours. When cool open it.



Gather all the things you will for dying.
i.e.

- A square of natural fabric such as silk, cotton or linen
- A large pot, preferably made from copper, iron or aluminium
- An assortment of leaves, stems, roots, colourful flowers and petals, either fresh or dried
- A few pieces of rusty metal such as screws or copper coins
- A couple of sticks, around 15-20cm long
- A steamer pan with at least two levels
- 2 cups of white vinegar
- Twine
- Scissors
- Tin foil
- Template for recording what you did

cloth

Photo/and/or
drawing of
plant

Cloth description

Drawing or photo
of plant used to
dye

Date

Description of the place you found the
plant

Process (describe what you did)

Elders story about natural dying (ask a
grandma how she does dying).



Step One: Thoroughly wash your fabrics

Hand wash your pieces of material with a natural fabric soap to remove any dressing that may prevent the dye from absorbing.



Step Two: Mordant your fabric

After washing, it is best to [mordant your material](#) to achieve the most vibrant colours from your natural dyes and ensure your final creation is colourfast. The mordanting process prepares the fibres to bond with the dyes, ensuring they can best penetrate the fabric. You want to start this at least a day before you plan to do your bundle dyeing.

While there is a world of information out there and you can easily purchase the most commonly used mineral mordants such as alum and iron online, I opted for a more amateur-friendly option called 'pot-as-mordant.' This involves soaking your fabrics in water in a copper, iron or aluminium pot, heating it for an hour and leaving to rest overnight. If you don't have a pot of that sort to hand, you can experiment with creating your own mordant by adding old copper pennies or bits of rusty metal to water and soaking your fabrics in that.

You should also soak your mordanted fabrics in diluted white vinegar for an hour prior to dyeing, which will work as a fixative to help set the colour. Use one part vinegar to four parts water for this.



Step Three: Soaking your petals

For the very best results, [Phillipa Grogan](#) also recommends soaking your petals and plant matter in the mordant water or white vinegar before use.

I added mine for an hour while the fabrics were still in there out of pure laziness, but it actually gave a very slight purple-tinge to the fabrics that I loved.



Step Four: Create your design

Once your fabrics are prepared, you're ready to start adding your botanical picks onto your fabric.

Wring out any excess water and lay the fabric flat. Arrange your petals, leaves and flowers onto one half of the fabric to create your desired design, spacing out similar colours. You can also choose to add a few rusty bits of metal into the bundle itself, which will help the colours to adhere.

Take notes and photos of the steps you took doing this exercise.



Step Five: Ready to roll

Once you have finished your design, fold the other half of the fabric over your design to cover it. You may need to fold it in half again, depending on the size of your fabric.

Place one of your sticks at the end of your bundle and your piece of plastic on top of the fabric, and begin tightly rolling your fabric around it. Once you have finished rolling, secure the bundle with a length of twine. Wrap the twine up and down in a zig zag pattern, tying off the end once you have covered the length of the bundle a few times.



Step Six: Steaming the bundle

Your bundle is now ready to be steamed. If it doesn't fit with the lid on, don't worry – you can wrap some tin foil around the pan to seal off any gaps.

You will need to steam your bundle for one or two hours, depending on the fabric you have used. For thicker, tightly woven fabrics it is best to allow a little more time. Turn your bundle every half an hour to ensure the color takes evenly.

Once your bundle has finished steaming, you want to leave it overnight before unwrapping to give the shades one last chance to intensify.



Step Seven: The big reveal

The next day, unwrap your bundle and brush off the plant materials for composting. The beauty of bundle dyeing is its complete unpredictability; you never quite know what shades or patterns your petals might create.

Make sure to allow your design to dry completely before lightly ironing to help set the color. Hem the edges of your designs and turn them into napkins, tablecloths, pillowcases, cushion covers or anything else;

Remember to take notes about your process.



Unraveling the bundles after 24 hours, still slightly damp

You may not get such bright colors – some may get no color. Have a look on the internet to see if you can find which plants will give color.