

MERSEYSIDE EXPRESSIVE STITCHERS GROUP
[MEG]
ZOOM WORKSHOP

BOTANICAL CONTACT ['ECO'] PRINTING
with Maggie Pearson

JULY 17TH 2021

LIST OF REQUIREMENTS

Plan of session

In the morning [10am – 12md] we will print a silk scarf with onion skins and make dye from onions skins, with which you can dye a second scarf. **I can supply the scarves if I am given enough notice to source them.**

In the afternoon [2pm – 4pm] we will print a piece of your cotton or linen with leaves.

Equipment and utensils

Normally, you should use dedicated equipment and utensils for botanical contact printing and dyeing which you do **not** use for preparing or cooking food. As you are **only** using onion skins, it is safe to use kitchen pots and utensils **for this workshop only.**

You will need the following **equipment and utensils:**

- **A large steamer, large saucepan** [diameter 12" if possible] or **fish kettle**. Aluminium would be perfect, but is not essential
- **A steamer basket, or wire tray** with something to raise it up, to place in your saucepan and keep your bundles out of the boiling water. This needs to fit your first, large pan.

- A **second saucepan** if available. This will be for making the onion skin dye, and can be smaller than 12"
- A **source of heat**, such as your stove top
- A **wooden dowel, metal rod or empty food can** to fit easily inside your saucepan or fish kettle, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter. A bit of a broom handle will do the trick. If using a food can, be sure to remove the glue after you've removed the label!
- **Tongs** for moving hot bundles around
- A pair of **sharp scissors** for snipping onion skins and cutting binding
- **Two buckets or large bowls:** one to move hot bundles around and one to soak your scarf in
- **Paper towels or a cloth** for mopping up spills/cleaning surfaces
- **Notebook** to record things as you go

For your **personal comfort** you may want to wear:

- An **apron**
- **Sturdy footwear** which will support your feet whilst standing for long periods and protect against any spills of hot [near boiling] liquids.

Materials

You will need the following **materials**:

- **Skins of approximately 10 onions.** If you decide to dye household linen or a tee shirt rather than, or in addition to, a scarf, you may need the skins of up to **20 onions**. If your local greengrocer or supermarket sells loose onions, you should be able to gather loose skins from the bottom of the onion boxes/crates. Your greengrocer might well save them for you, if asked. You can save onion skins in the kitchen in a separate container, and even ask friends to save them for you. [I regularly arrive home to find bags of onion skins on my doorstep from friends!]
- Two white, cream or pale coloured **silk or wool scarves** [see list of suppliers below]. Pongee silk is fine for this workshop, but you could use silk habotai
- **Unperfumed, pH neutral soap** [olive oil is the best, but Stergene, liquid soap flakes, Dove soap or Woolite are fine]
- **Vinegar**, white or malt
- **Brown rubber bands** [coloured ones may mark your fabric]

- **Bindings** for your bundle: crepe bandage, T shirt yarn, string or strips of old sheet
- **Pieces of white or pale coloured plain linen or cotton** to print with leaves, from your stash or old table linen, pillow cases, tea towels
- **A barrier layer** of plastic/biodegradable 'plastic' OR old wool blanket OR double thickness terry fabric OR double thickness of thick sheeting which is just a bit bigger than your piece of cotton
- **Iron sulphate**, a mordant and colour modifier. Participants will only need approx. 0.5 tsp per half bucket of water!
- **Clothes pegs** [optional.. for dyeing a second scarf]
- **Marbles or large beads** [optional.. for dyeing a second scarf]

Leaves for printing [afternoon session]

Any of the following will print well:

- blackberry leaves
- hardy [bushy] geraniums.. the sort which give great ground cover
- rose leaves
- paeony leaves [bush or tree]
- silver birch
- maple
- walnut
- Japanese acer
- Sumac
- sycamore

I suggest that participants pick leaves early that morning, or the night before and EITHER put them in a sealed container or bag in the fridge, OR put the stalks/branches in water overnight.

Please note: we will focus on using animal/protein fibres with onions: principally silk, but you can use wool if you wish. **I always suggest starting with silk** because it can be sourced more cheaply than wool.

Work station

Last, but not least, you will need a good **work surface**, at least 1.5 metres/5 feet long, on which to set out a scarf full length. Ideally it would be the height of a kitchen worktop, so that you can stand and work comfortably without bending your back.

By Maggie naturally

<https://www.bymaggienaturally.co.uk>

PREPARING YOUR FABRIC

Washing/'scouring'

One of the keys to successful botanical contact prints is **good contact** between the plant matter and the target fibre. It's therefore very important to thoroughly clean your target fabric first. Animal and plant fibres are prepared differently.

For **animal fibres** [silk, wool] which you are using in this workshop, a **good wash with pH neutral soap** is enough to remove any grease or dirt left behind by the manufacturing process. Olive oil soap, soap solution, Dove soap, Woolite or Stergene are mild enough to be used in a hand wash or in a delicates cycle in the washing machine.¹ **DO NOT USE WASHING SODA WITH ANIMAL FIBRES.** It will ruin them.

If you are also planning to use **cellulose fibres** [eg cotton, linen], a wash or "scour" with **mild, pH neutral soap and a tablespoon of washing soda** in the drum of the machine on a hot cycle, or simmered for an hour on the top of the stove, will release a quite remarkable amount of grease and dirt.

Once you have thoroughly cleaned your scarf/fabric, it should be left damp if you are going to use it immediately. If you are not going to use it straight away, you can let it dry until you are ready to use it, and then give it a good soak in warm water for at least an hour before use [Longer for thicker fabrics].

Soaking in vinegar/water solution: **ONLY FOR SILK SCARVES**

Vinegar is an acid and modifies leaf pigments. It is **not a mordant**, that is, it does not help to bind/fix pigments or dyes to cloth. However, it is believed to brighten the colour of red/brown pigments.

Make up a large bowl of enough 50% vinegar/50% warm water to enable your **damp** silk scarf/scarves to float freely for at least half an hour and absorb the fluid.

¹ For **cellulose fibres** [eg cotton, linen] which we are not using in this course, a wash or "scour" with mild, pH neutral soap and a tablespoon of washing soda in the drum of the machine on a hot cycle, or simmered for an hour on the top of the stove will release a quite remarkable amount of grease and dirt.

Squeeze your scarf of water before you pop it into the vinegar solution: water acts as a barrier and if **it is too wet, the scarf will not take up the vinegar.**

When the scarf has had a good soak and you are ready to begin working with it, squeeze it tightly to remove most of the fluid. It needs to be **damp, not sopping wet.** Again, **if the scarf is too wet, the water will prevent the onion skin pigments** from penetrating the scarf, and you will just get blurry prints.

SUPPLIERS

It is not necessary to use new fabric for this workshop. However, you will be starting with printing on silk, because it takes onion skin prints particularly well, and it tends to be much more difficult to find second hand than cellulose fabrics. You will more than likely need to purchase new silk scarves.

For the third task, Dyeing with Onion Skins, you can use pre-loved cellulose fabrics such as old bedlinen or table cloths and napkins, but you may need to gather more onion skins, as these fabrics can be very 'thirsty' in respect of dye.

- Rainbow Silks, <https://www.rainbowsilks.co.uk> for the widest range of silk scarves. They also stock silk yardage and stock Eri 'peace' silk
- Art Van Go, <https://www.vycombe-arts.co.uk> for small Pongee 5 silk scarves
- Whaleys of Bradford <https://www.whaleys-bradford.ltd.uk> supply silk yardage
- Botanical Inks <https://botanicalinks.bigcartel.com/product/satin-silk> for Peace Silk yardage
- George Weil <https://www.georgeweil.com> for silk scarves and iron sulphate
- The Silk Route <https://www.thesilkroute.co.uk> for silk yardage and a wide range of silks, but no scarves
- DT Crafts <https://www.dtcrafts.co.uk/?s=iron+sulphate> for iron sulphate
- Amazon has a wide range of providers of iron sulphate

Maggie Pearson/27 June 2021 [updated]