

Below, you'll find recipes for several different colors of ink, but the process of making each one is basically the same. Simmer 1 cup of fresh or 1/2 cup of dried plant material with 1 cup of water and a mordant (if necessary) for 20 to 30 minutes. Strain out the plant material. You should have about 3-4 ounces of liquid. Whisk in 1/2 teaspoon gum Arabic while the ink is still warm so it dissolves easily, and let it cool. Pour the cooled ink into a small bottle and add 3 drops of thyme essential oil. The ink is ready to use to write or draw.

Coreopsis Ink

- 1/2 cup dried coreopsis blooms (*coreopsis tinctoria*)
- 1 cup water 1 teaspoon alum
- 1/2 tsp. gum Arabic
- 3 drops thyme essential oil

Simmer the dried flowers with the water and alum for 20 minutes. Strain out the flowers. You should have about 4 ounces of liquid. Whisk in the gum Arabic until it is dissolved. Cool and pour into a small bottle. Add 3 drops of thyme oil and shake a couple times to mix.

Avocado Pit Ink

- 2 large fresh avocado pits, chopped into small pieces
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon soda ash
- 1/2 tsp. gum Arabic
- 3 drops thyme essential oil

Simmer the avocado pits and soda ash in the water for 20 minutes. Strain out the pits and whisk in the gum Arabic. Cool and pour into a small bottle. Add the thyme oil and shake to mix.

Black Raspberry Ink

- 1 cup fresh black raspberries
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tsp. alum
- 1/2 tsp. gum Arabic
- 3 drops thyme essential oil

Cook the raspberries with the water and alum for 15 minutes, mashing the berries to release the juice. Strain out the berries and whisk in the gum Arabic until dissolved. Cool and pour into a small bottle. Add 3 drops of thyme oil and shake to combine.

Black Tea Ink

- 1/2 cup tea leaves
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 tsp. gum Arabic
- 3 drops thyme essential oil

Boil the tea leaves and water for 15 minutes. Strain out the tea leaves and whisk in the gum Arabic. Cool and pour into a small bottle. Add the thyme oil and shake to combine.

Black Walnut Ink

- 1/2 cup dried walnut hulls
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 tsp. gum Arabic
- 3 drops thyme essential oil

Boil the walnut hulls with water for 30 minutes. Strain out the hulls and whisk in the gum Arabic. Cool and pour into a small bottle. Add the thyme essential oil and shake to combine.

Black Permanent Ink Recipe

The most popular ink, black permanent ink can be prepared at home using the following materials:

- 1/2 tsp lamp black (This you can buy or make yourself by holding a plate over a candle and collecting the soot, or by collecting another form of char.)
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tsp gum arabic
- 1/2 cup honey

Mix the egg yolk, gum arabic, and honey. Stir in the lamp black. This will produce a thick paste that you can store in a sealed container. To use the ink, mix this paste with a small amount of water to achieve the desired consistency. Applying a small amount of heat may improve the consistency of the solution but be careful—too much heat will make the ink difficult to write with.

Brown Ink Recipe

Brown ink is a popular alternative to black ink and can be prepared without any char or lamp black. All you need to make it is:

- 4 teaspoons loose tea or 4-5 tea bags
- 1 teaspoon gum arabic
- 1/2 cup boiling water

Pour the boiling water over the tea. Allow the tea to steep for about 15 minutes. Squeeze as much tea (tannin) as possible from the tea or teabags. Stir in the gum arabic and mix until you have a consistent solution. Strain the ink so that you are left with a thick paste and allow it to cool before bottling it.

Prussian Blue Ink Recipe

An even simpler recipe, and one that produces a bold color, is this recipe for Prussian blue, which painters have been using since the early 1700s. All you need to make it is:

- Prussian Blue pigment (sometimes sold as laundry bluing)
- Water

Mix the pigment into the water until you have a rich blue ink with a thick consistency.

Unless you happen to have a calligraphy pen, the easiest way to use these inks is with a homemade quill or a paintbrush.

Blackberry Ink Recipe

Like the recipe above, this one produces a rich blue ink, but one that is darker and made entirely of natural materials. To make it, you will need:

- 1 cup blackberries
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 tsp gum arabic
- 4 drops thyme oil

First, heat the blackberries in the water, pressing them to release the juice. Once the mixture is dark blue and all of the juice is released, strain the mixture and stir in the gum arabic until you have produced a thick paste. Add the thyme oil and stir. Allow the ink to cool before bottling it.

Coffee Bean Ink

Coffee beans make a great ink pigment. Grind the coffee beans (or use a dark espresso powder and you have your pigment.

- 1/2 cup ground coffee
- 4 cups water
- 1 tsp vinegar
- 1 tsp salt

Put the coffee and water in a pot and simmer on low for an hour. Remove from heat and allow to steep overnight. This step isn't necessary but the longer it steeps, the darker your ink will be.

Strain the ink through a fine-screened sieve and return to stove.

Simmer the ink on low until it reaches desired consistency and color. Add the vinegar and salt to lock the color in. You should have about 1 cup of ink when you're done. Store in a small glass jar with a lid, such as baby food jar.

Herbal and Plant Inks

Herbs and plants make wonderful inks and can give you a nice array of colors, too. The premise is the same as that of coffee beans or walnut shells. Just grind a cup full of your favorite herbs and then boil as you would the coffee beans.

The rest of the process is exactly the same. Imagine the beautiful range of colors that you can make with dandelions, roses, tulips, bright green leaves, tea leaves, clover flowers, carnations, lilies, orchids, or any other herb or plant that you can imagine. Don't forget to lock the colors in with the vinegar and salt.

Flower petal ink-

Collect petals from your favourite flowers and squash them down into a jam jar. Cover the petals with boiling water- just enough to cover them. Leave this mixture overnight so the colour can leach out of the petals. The next day, strain the petal tea through a cheese cloth or old t-shirt and pour into a clean jar. Add a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of vinegar and a teaspoon of gum Arabic. Shake to mix and leave overnight so the gum Arabic can dissolve.

Tea bag ink- (use ordinary tea or try different herbal tea bags for this recipe)

Put 6 fresh teabags in a mug and half fill the mug with boiling water. Leave to steep until cold. Squeeze the teabags carefully, collecting all the tea and discard the bags. Pour your tea into a clean jar. Add a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of vinegar and a teaspoon of gum Arabic. Shake to mix and leave overnight so the gum Arabic can dissolve.

Vegetable inks (try red cabbage, white or red onion skins or beetroot)

Chop your vegetable parts into small pieces and place in a saucepan. Cover with water and boil for 30 minutes. Make sure the pan does not boil dry- add a little more water if necessary. Leave your vegetable tea to cool. Strain the liquid through a cheesecloth or old t-shirt. Add a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of vinegar and a teaspoon of gum Arabic. Shake to mix and leave overnight so the gum Arabic can dissolve.

Leaf ink

Gather green leaves from the garden- any leaves will do, you could simply pull up some weeds or cut some grass. Put your leaves and half a cup of water into a food blender and blend them until you have a thick green soup. Strain this soup through a cheese cloth or old t-shirt. Add a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of vinegar and a teaspoon of gum Arabic. Shake to mix and leave overnight so the gum Arabic can dissolve.

Spice ink (such as turmeric or paprika. This also works with crushed charcoal)

Put 2 tablespoons of your chosen spice in a jam jar and cover with boiling water. Replace the lid and shake regularly over the next day. Strain the liquid through a cheese cloth or old t-shirt (you may need to repeat this step several times). Add a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of vinegar and a teaspoon of gum Arabic. Shake to mix and leave overnight so the gum Arabic can dissolve.

Always shake your inks before use and store them in the fridge to help preserve the colour. The vinegar and salt will help to preserve your inks and they should last for several weeks. You can make inks with an alcohol base (such as vodka) instead of water if you wish to store them for longer.

Flame of Forest Ink

Collect fallen flowers (about 200gm) and boil them in water with a pinch of sodium bicarbonate (just enough to cover flowers) in the pot to have a concentrated ink. After cooling add a bit of alcohol as a preservative. You can also add vinegar and salt as an alternative preservative.

Rooibos Tea Ink

I took 1 tsp of loose Rooibos tea and allowed it to steep in approx. 15 ml of boiling water for 20 minutes or so. Filter the tea and added a pinch of baking soda (sodium-bi-carbonate) and boil the

tea for a few minutes. To thicken it you can add a bit of powdered gum arabic. If you don't have gum arabic you can use it as it is too. To keep this ink for long add 1/2 a tsp of vinegar and a pinch of salt as a preservative (optional).

Red Chards

Crush them using a pestle and mortar and added boiling water to extract the dye.

Plant-based Ink

Mordant: Some natural dyes, including black walnuts, onion skins, tea or turmeric, are called substantive, meaning they don't require a mordant to bind with the fibers or retain wash and light fastness. However, most other plants do. Mordants are generally tannins or mineral salts. The most common and safest mordants are alum and iron. Iron can be obtained by boiling the dye in an iron skillet or adding a rusty piece of iron to the pot. Soda ash is also known as washing soda or sodium carbonate. It is an alkaline mordant and will bring out different colors from the plant material.

Gum Arabic: This is used to thicken the liquid. It helps the ink flow onto the paper in a controlled fashion and binds the ink with the paper. It will also help preserve the color.

Thyme Oil: This is used to help prevent mold from forming in the ink.

General recipe: Simmer 1 cup of fresh or 1/2 cup of dried plant material with 1 cup of water and a mordant (if necessary) for 20 to 30 minutes. Strain out the plant material. You should have about 3-4 ounces of liquid. Whisk in 1/2 teaspoon gum Arabic while the ink is still warm so it dissolves easily, and let it cool. Pour the cooled ink into a small bottle and add 3 drops of thyme essential oil. The ink is ready to use to write or draw.

Natural binders to thicken your ink

Binders are not needed to use your ink, but for some herbal preparations, can really make a difference in holding the ink on the paper as well as thickening the ink to the desired consistency. These are the most often used natural binders that are used in ink solutions:

- Grass-fed gelatin - In a small pan over medium heat, heat 1 cup water, and 2 tsp. gelatin. Stir over heat until completely dissolved. Add 1 tsp. of the gelatin solution to your ink at a time, until your ink reaches desired consistency and thickness.
- Raw unfiltered honey- This can be added straight to the ink until it reaches the consistency that you are looking for. Too much and it can get too sticky!
- Gum arabic powder - This option is completely vegan and made from resin from acacia trees! You can either slowly whisk directly into the ink or mix 1 Tbsp. gum arabic with 1 cup water. Add 1 tsp. of the Arabic solution to your ink at a time, until desired consistency is reached.

Colours

- Avocado pit = pink
- Beets = magenta pink
- Black walnut shells = deep magenta to black
- Black raspberry = purple
- Blueberry = blue
- Carrot = yellow
- Coffee = rich brown
- Red cabbage = purple
- Red or pink roses = pink
- Red onion skin = green
- Spinach = yellow green
- Turmeric = yellow
- Yellow onion skins = orange

Colours from Berries

- Huckleberry (Garden, Wild) – Produces a nice denim blue ink (PHOTO BELOW)
- Pokeberry – Produces a hot pink ink (please don't eat these berries, they are poisonous) (PHOTO BELOW)
- Buckthorn, common – Produces a hunter green ink (yes, the ink looks purple, but wait 15-30 minutes and it will radically change. A little goes a long way!) (PHOTO BELOW)
- Black Raspberry – Produces a light purple ink (after 1-2 years, it will darken to a brown)
- Red Raspberry – Produces a medium pink ink
- Blackberry – Produces a purplish ink
- Black Cherry – Produces a purplish/pinkish ink (depending on the kind of cherry)

- Red Cherry – Produces a light pink ink or red ink (again, depending on the kind of cherry)
- Walnut – Not a berry, but does produce a nice brown ink. I'll have another post on how to do this as its slightly different.

How to make blue ink using copper oxide

Copper can be found almost anywhere in a city. Pennies, copper wire, copper wool, or copper wire sponges (available from most hardware stores) are all great sources. I sometimes buy "copper chop," an industrial recycling product found deep in suburban industrial parks.

Materials

- glass jar
- ½ cup (600 g) copper scraps
- 2 cups (480 mL) white vinegar, plus more
- 1 tablespoon salt
- spoon or stir stick
- strainer
- glass containers with tightfitting lids
- rubber gloves

Method

1. In a large glass jar, cover the copper with vinegar until fully submerged. Add the salt.
2. Leave the mixture in a well-ventilated area, uncovered, away from pets and kids, for 1 to 3 weeks, until you have a rich, blue-colored liquid. Stir twice a day, adding more vinegar as the liquid evaporates to keep the copper pieces fully covered.
3. Once the desired hue has been reached, strain the ink and pour into individual glass containers with tightfitting lids. The color may separate into a transparent darker blue and a lighter milkier liquid. Shaken together, these will form a beautiful drawing ink.

Making art with copper oxide ink

Salt acts as a catalyst for the oxidation of copper. It also causes copper ink to form crystals on paper. This is an ink that will destroy a metal pen nib but that looks beautiful brushed onto paper, with many variations and textures. The fun here is in experimentation. When it comes to color pairing, I love the turquoise blue of copper oxide ink with a glossy black India ink. It also pairs well

with wild grape ink or a light wash of black walnut ink (both recipes are featured in the book). The most intense source of natural blue is indigo, which makes a beautiful ink if you can find it. Cornflowers, black beans, woad, mulberries, blueberries, or wild grape juice with baking soda added to it are less permanent and less intense but easier to deal with.

Important safety note: Use rubber gloves while following this recipe, and work in a well-ventilated area. Keep both ink-in-progress and finished ink out of the reach of children and pets.

Info Sourced From:

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