

# Resources for Period European Dyeing

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**The Dye Woorkes** (<http://www.elizabethancostume.net/dyes>)

## Books on Post-Roman & Medieval Dye Recipes (300 A.D. - 1300 A.D.)

Caley, Earle. "[The Leyden Papyrus X](#)." *Journal of Chemical Education*, vol. III October 1926. pages 1149-1166.  
Translation and commentary on a third-century Egyptian manuscript. Contains about a dozen dyeing recipes, mixed with other recipes on making metal alloys and inks and other chemical processes.

Caley, Earle. "[The Stockholm Papyrus](#)" *Journal of Chemical Education*, vol IV August 1927. pages 978-1002.

Translation of another third century manuscript on a variety of metallurgical and other miscellaneous scientific processes. Contains a large number of recipes, the majority for purple. Also has recipes for dyeing leather.

Smith, Cyril and Hawthorne, John. "[Mappae Clavicula](#)", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* Volume 64, Part 4 (July 1974).

A manuscript from the 800s or 900s in the tradition of the Leyden and Stockholm papyruses, the Mappae Clavicula contains a few recipes on dyeing (mostly dyeing leather) and two recipes for making soap among the other scribal and alchemical recipes.

Hedfors, Hjalmar. *Compositiones ad Tigenda Musiva: Herausgegeben Ubersetzt und Philologisch Erklärt*.

Contains full text the Compositiones ad Tivenda Musiva, a.k.a. Compositiones Variiae, a.k.a. the Lucca Manuscript. Most likely compiled in 7th c. Alexandria, translated into Latin in Italy around 750-800. The C ad TV makes reference to Assyrian, Egyptian, Greco-Byzantine, Arab and Indian materials. This publication also includes excerpts of related texts: the Mappae Clavicula, Codex Matritensis, Liber Sacerdotum, de Coloribus et artibus Romanorum by Heraclius, Schedule Diversarum Artium.

Cardon, Dominique. "New information on the medieval woad vat." *Dyes in History and Archaeology*, no. 10, pp. 22-31. York: Textile Research Associates, 1992.

Compares information from three different sources on woad dyeing--two treatises (Venice and Florence) and some earlier guild regulations (Catalonia).

Hurst, Tony. "Early Anglo-Norman Receipts for Colours." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 58 (1995), pp. 203-209.

Includes a 12th century recipe for green using broom and buckthorn.

Theophilus. *On Divers Arts* [De Diversis Artibus], corrected edition, trans. John G. Hawthorne and Cyril Stanley Smith. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

An early 12th century German manuscript, translated with commentary. Describes the use of madder to dye bone and ivory; also reference to dyeing silk with saffron.

## 14th & 15th centuries (1300 A.D.-1500 A.D.)

Anonymous, *Innsbruck Manuscript*. 1330, Tirol. Innsbruck Ferdinandsmuseum. Transcription printed in E. E. Ploss' *Ein Buch von Alten Farben*, Heinz Moos Verlag, Munich, 1967.

This fourteenth-century manuscript contains a small collection of dyeing recipes for a wide variety of colors.

Anonymous, *Nurnberger Kunstbuch*. Stadtbibliothek Nurnberg. Transcription printed in E. E. Ploss' *Ein Buch von Alten Farben*, Heinz Moos Verlag, Munich, 1967.

The Nurnberger Kunstbuch, a mid-to late fifteenth century manuscript, contains several recipes for cleaning fabric, dyeing fabric, painting on fabric, and cutting vestments out of particular kinds of fabric. Also contains glassmaking and paintmaking recipes.

Anonymous, *Oberdeutsches Färbbuchlein*. Transcription printed in E. E. Ploss' *Ein Buch von Alten Farben*, Heinz Moos Verlag, Munich, 1967.

This is a book of recipes for making paints and dyes, from the late 15th century.

Cardon, Dominique. *Natural Dyes*. 2007, Antique Collector's Club.

This has replaced Brunelli as my go-to book when needing information. Encyclopedic, comprehensive and full of detail on specific dyestuffs of the middle ages and their uses.

Cennini, Cennino d'Andrea. *Il Libro dell'Arte*, trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. Dover, 1960.

Deals primarily with pigments and painting, but has a short section on block-printing.

de Graaff, Judith. *The Colourful Past*. Archetype Books, 2007.

This amazing book dives into specific analysis of medieval artifacts and the dyestuffs used for them. Want to know when kermes was replaced by cochineal in 16th century Europe, and what recipes were used for black? This is your book.

Jehan le Begue. *Experimenta de Coloribus*. translated and published in M. Merrifield's *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting*, reprinted by Dover, 1967.

a manuscript from 1431, with recipes for painting, but contains some recipes on cleaning fabric, two or three recipes on dyes, and some instructions on fabric painting.

Ghiara, Carola. *L'arte Tintoria a Genova dal XV al XVII Secolo Tecniche e Organizzazione*. (The art of dyeing in genoa from the 15th through 17th century, techniques and organization.) Giunti, 1976.

An overview of the dyer's art and guild regulatin from the 15th through 17th century.

Gargioli, G. *L'Arte della Seta in Firenze, Trattato del secolo XV*. Ed. G. Barbera, Florence, 1868.

This is a two-volume facimile print and a modern (Italian) transcription of a fifteenth-century treatise on silk working in Florence. It contains an extensive section on dyestuffs and silk-dyeing processes, as well as a dialogue on silk that discusses silk dyeing as well.

, Milan, 1970. Rebor, G *Un Manuale di Tintoria del Quattrocento*, ed. Dott. A. Giuffre

Transcription and commentary (in Italian) of a late 15th c. Venetian manuscript on dyeing.

"Trattato d'Arte della Lana", in Alfred Doren, *Die Florentiner Woollentuchindustrie vom Vierzehnten bis zum Sechzehnten Jahrhundert*. J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger GMBH, 1901.

The treatise is Appendix one in this German work on the Florentine Wool Industry. The treatise itself is printed in Italian. Doren notes that portions of this treatise are also found in *L'Arte della Seta in Firenze* by Gargioli, on folio 123, but not all of it. Doren's book also contains a document of tariffs and rules for Dyers (Appendix 5a & 5b) and an inventory of a dyer's shop (Appendix Vc) and a detailed timeline of wool and dyeing related activities and events in Florence from 1317-1458.

[Segreti per Colori](#), translated and published in M. Merrifield's *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting*, reprinted by Dover, 1967.

A substantial fifteenth century treatise primarily focused on pigments, which also contains recipes for dyeing fabric, thread and leather.

Müllerott, Hansjürgen. *Beiträge zur Waidtagung: Internationale Waidtagung in Erfurt 1992*. Deutsche Ausgabe

A collection of articles based on talks given at the international conference on Woad Dyeing in 1992. All articles are given in English, German and French. This document includes the earliest known medieval recipe for dyeing with woad.

## 16th & 17th Centuries (1500-1700)

H. G. Frencken ed, *T'Bouck va Wondre*, 1513. Pröschrift, Leiden, 1934.

A Dutch commonplace book containing several dyeing and cleaning recipes as well as instructions for hardening steel, grafting apple trees, etc. The transcription in this book is Dutch, but several of the recipes were transcribed word-for-word into the later 16th century English work, [A Profitable Book](#).

Braekman, W. I. *Dat Batement van Recepten: Een secreetboek uit de zestiende eeuw* Pub. in the Scripta Series on Mediaeval and Renaissance Text 7 Studies, #25, 1990.

Another Dutch Commonplace book from 1525, also containing some fabric cleaning and dyeing recipes.

S. M. Edelstein, ed. "[The Allerley Matkel \(1532\) . Facsimile text, translation and critical study of the earliest printed book on spot removing and dyeing](#)", *Journal of Technology and Culture*, 1964, p. 297-321.

Translation of a German work on cleaning fabrics. Also contains a few dye recipes.

Rosetti, Gioanventura. *The Plictho of Gioanventura Rosetti: Instructions in the Art of the Dyers which Teaches the Dyeing of Woolen Cloths, Linens, Cottons, and Silk by the Great Art as Well as by the Common*, trans. Sidney M. Edelstein and Hector C. Borghetty. The M.I.T. Press, 1969.

The Plictho was first published in 1548, and has several hundred recipes for dyeing silk, wool and linen in many colors. Most of the recipes are for various reds and black. Also describes how to dye wood, feathers & leather.

Leonard Mascall [A Profitable Book, declaring divers approoued Remedies, to take out spots and staines in Silkes, Veluets, Linnen and Woollen Clothes: With diuers Colours how to die Veluets and Silkes, Linnenn and Woollen, Fustian and Thread...](#) Pub. Thomas Purfoot, in 1586 and again in 1605.

This is the earliest known English book focused on dyeing and spot cleaning. The majority of the recipes come from earlier Dutch commonplace books, like *T'Bouck va Wondre*, and some are copied from the *Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*. Extensive descriptions of dyeing many different colors on wool and linen, with a bit of information on silk.

Ruscelli, Giovanni. [The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont](#). ed. Willyam Warde, 1580.

This book was reprinted in many volumes and many editions over the 16th century. It was originally written in Italian but translated into many other languages. It contained receipts and instructions for several dyeing and leather dyeing recipes, as well as recipes for cleaning fabric.

Struckmeier, Sabine. *Die Textilfärberei vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Frühen Neuzeit (14.-16. Jahrhundert)* (Textile dyeing from the late middle ages to early modern times (14-1600s). Waxmann Verlag GmbH (2011).

This recent publication is fantastic--an overview of all known medieval and early modern dye recipes, with an analysis of their materials and notes on attempts at redacting the recipes. It is in German, but if you have the will to plow through it, it is full of amazing information and no small number of previously unknown-to-English medieval dye recipes.

Ziegler, Marx. "[Little Dye Book](#)." *Weber Kunst und Bild Buch*, trans. by Patricia Hilt as Part I of *The Weavers Art Revealed: Facsimile, Translation, and Study of the First Two Published Books on Weaving*. *Ars Textrina*, Volume 13, December 1990.

First published in 1677, this little book contains thirty-one dyeing recipes, focusing primarily on linen and on dyeing yarn.

*Ars Tinctoria Experimentalis, oder curieuse Wollkommene Endecken der Faerbe-kunst*. pub 1685, reprinted (in English) in the 1705 work [The Whole Art of Dyeing](#).

A book with several hundred recipes on dyeing wool, silk and linen, also containing treatises on the culture & manufacture of kermes & potash.

Colbert, Jean-Baptiste. *Instruction générale pour la teinture des laines et manufacture de laine de toutes couleurs et pour la culture des drogues ou ingrediens qu'on y emploie*. Paris, Frédéric Léonard, 1669.

This was one of the seminal treatises on dyeing and how it ought to be carried forth. It was reprinted in English as part II of the 1705 work, [The Whole Art of Dyeing](#). Contains much information on dyeing processes and techniques as well as the cultivation & processing of woad, madder and other dyestuffs.

[The Whole Art of Dyeing in Two Parts](#). Pub. William Pearson, 1705.

A compilation of the two seventeenth century books listed above, translated into English with commentary by the author.

Lumscher, Nathaniel. *A Newly Published Dyer's Delight with an Assortment of Colors for Dyeing on Linen and Wool*. trans. by Patricia Hilt as Part II of *The Weavers Art Revealed*. *Ars Textrina* Volume 14, December 1990.

First published in 1708, this manuscript included recipes from Ziegler's [Little Dye Book](#) as well as many more.

# Dyestuff Suppliers

[Aurora Silk Natural Dyes](http://www.aurorasilk.com/) (<http://www.aurorasilk.com/>)

Also sells books on natural dyeing, and silk fiber.

Buy Cochineal Dye (<http://www.cochinealdye.com/html/cochineal.html>) for buying cochineal in bulk at wholesale prices.

[Black Walnut Hull Powder](#) from Kalyx.com.

Kalyx sells this in bulk, enough to dye with. The dyestuff in Black Walnut hulls is very similar to that in english walnuts, a common brown dye of the middle ages. Best results are obtained using a 1/1 ratio of powder to fiber, and soaking the powder for 24 hours beforehand. No mordant is required.

[George Weil Fibrecrafts Dyes](http://www.georgeweil.com/fibre crafts.aspx) (<http://www.georgeweil.com/fibre crafts.aspx>)

British source for many period dyes, including the more hard-to-find persian berries, weld, safflower, elderberries and Dyer's Greenweed.

[Griffin Dye Works](http://www.griffindyeworks.com/store/) (<http://www.griffindyeworks.com/store/>)

Many, many period dyestuffs, including materials for very early period dyes: pomegranite rind, lac, myrobalan, red earth. Also carries rare mordants & modifiers: unslaked lime (aka calcium oxide), hartshorn, urea, clubmoss, oxalic acid, & bran.

[Hill Creek Fibers](http://www.hillcreekfiberstudio.com/HFS-Shop-v10/contents/en-us/d3.html) (<http://www.hillcreekfiberstudio.com/HFS-Shop-v10/contents/en-us/d3.html>)

Basic mordants; good selection of period dyes, including woad powder (aka "Bleu de Lectour").

[Kremer Pigments](#)

Carries almost all period dyestuffs, including hard-to-find item like dragon's blood, woad powder, persian berries, and even the original Tyrian purple. Stay away from their weld, though--very bad quality, and produces a weak yellow.

[Maiwa Natural Dyes](http://www.maiwa.com/home/supply/natural_dyes/) ([http://www.maiwa.com/home/supply/natural\\_dyes/](http://www.maiwa.com/home/supply/natural_dyes/))

Good source for a wide variety of medieval dyes, including woad powder.

[Mannam Oriental Carpet Weaving Supplies](http://weaversupplies.com/Dye-rates.html) (<http://weaversupplies.com/Dye-rates.html>)

Located in Pakistan; limited number of dyestuffs and a minimum 10 kg order, but their bulk prices are very good.

[Prairie Fibers Dyes](http://www.prairiefibers.com/Dyeing%20with%20Natural%20Dyes.htm) (<http://www.prairiefibers.com/Dyeing%20with%20Natural%20Dyes.htm>)

A wide variety of period dyes and mordants.

[Renaissance Dyeing](http://www.renaissancedyeing.com) (<http://www.renaissancedyeing.com>)

If you want naturally dyed silks and yarn but don't want to do it yourself, this company specializes in naturally dyed fibers using historic dyestuffs.

Wild Colours ([http://www.wildcolours.co.uk/html/natural\\_dyes\\_and\\_seeds.html](http://www.wildcolours.co.uk/html/natural_dyes_and_seeds.html))

UK Supplier for natural dyestuffs and mordants, as well as wool for dyeing and seeds for dye plants.

[Woad Dye](http://www.boutique.bleu-de-lectoure.com/) (<http://www.boutique.bleu-de-lectoure.com/>) from Bleu de Lectour