

Scour Fibre for Dyeing

CELLULOSE FIBRES

(cotton, linen, hemp, rayon, bamboo)

1. Put enough water into a large non-reactive pot to cover your fibre/cloth etc. Should not be crowded.
2. For each half pound (250 g.) of fibre, add 1tsp. Synthrapol or other pH neutral detergent, plus 4 tsp. Soda ash or washing soda.
3. Simmer 1 – 2 hours. Rinse in plain water.

New unbleached cotton is full of waxes, pectins, and oils which will turn the water yellow brown. Bleached or mercerized fabrics will require less time, but the fibres still have coatings that gave them strength during the rigorous mechanical weaving process. Even older cloth that has been washed many times needs to be scoured, to remove detergent residue. Scouring leaves the fibres “naked”, so the dye molecules can find lots of good attachment sites.

PROTEIN FIBRES

(wool, silk, hair, leather – though I'm not sure about scouring leather.)

Fill a big pot with water, and add 1 tsp. Orvus paste or mild detergent for each 300 g. fibre. Gently bring up to simmer over 20 minutes. Turn fibre occasionally, but do not agitate. Let it cool down slowly in the bath, then rinse in lukewarm water. A mass of fleece can be put into a net bag. You want to avoid temperature shocks that could cause felting.

EITHER METHOD – Be sure to weigh your fibre first, while it is still dry. You need to know the weight for many dye recipes. Especially important if you're scouring at the last minute, and bringing wet fibre to the dye day!

SUPPLIES – Synthrapol is sold wherever dyes are sold, it is a powerful dispersing agent, not a detergent for cleaning. It is used also at the end of dyeing, to drive off any unfixed dye molecules.

Washing soda can be found in the Club section at Save-On, in a big bucket. Maybe contact other members to share. Be sure not to get anything with bleach included. Soda ash is a more pure version, found with dye supplies.

Orvus paste is specially formulated for cleaning animal hairs – often on live show animals! Can be found at both dye supplies and vet/animal care supplies.