

Natural Inks

Items you can find at Home

Using some of the things you may find at home we can create a variety of different inks.

Tea (loose or bags) – Creates a brown effect. Good for adding backgrounds or making faint lines

Coffee – Creates a darker effect than tea

Turmeric – Makes an orangey yellow

Paprika – Makes a reddish brown

Mint – Dried mint (not fresh) will create a dark green.

To use these as inks, experiment by adding a tablespoon of the dried ingredient, then two tablespoons of water and a pinch of salt. Watch the consistency as they change with whatever ingredient you're using.

Any dried ingredient becomes more potent the longer it's left to seep into water/vinegar as the pigment will be drawn out better.

Foraging:

Blackberries

These are very much in season and good for picking from August – September in the UK. You can pick wild ones – often called brambles – yourself for free from hedgerows, on the sides of footpaths and around the city.

How to make it into ink: When foraging, be careful as the brambles often have thorns. Pick the ones that are ripe (they will feel soft, have a dark colour and will pick off easily with your fingertips). I filled a recycled container full of them, and added two large tablespoons of apple cider vinegar (You can also use white vinegar or lemon juice to help bring out the colour with the acidity) I then half filled the container with warm water and using the back of a spoon made sure all the blackberries were squeezed out. If you prefer you can use a mortar and pestle. I then left the mix for an hour. To get rid of the pulp and the lumpy bits, I used a coffee filter to pour the mix into another container which gave me the ink. I then composted pulp I didn't need in my garden. If you don't have coffee filters you can use a sieve or a muslin cloth for berries.

Cherries and other berries: I also found wild cherries that can be used in the same way. Some berries like this however would need the pip removed before they can be ground.

Foraging is entirely dependent on what's in season.

Spinach

If you have a garden or allotment then you may find more things to use. Take spinach for example. You can also buy it locally like I did and use it to make a great green ink. I used a packet here of baby spinach to a recycled container. I added $\frac{1}{4}$ of the pack to start with, added 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar (You can also use white vinegar), and half filled the container with water. I then used a spoon to slowly grind the spinach down, once I felt like it was enough, I'd add another $\frac{1}{4}$ of the packet until it was finished. The vinegar helps bring out the green in the spinach with the acidity, but unlike the blackberries, you can smell it in the mixture. I then left the mix for an hour. To get rid of the pulp and the lumpy bits, I used a coffee filter to pour the mix into another container which gave me the ink. I then composted pulp I didn't need in my garden. If you don't have coffee filters you can use a sieve.

Other things you can also use: Beetroot, Fresh Mint, Strawberries, Raspberries, Blueberries, Red Cabbage, Hazelnut, Elderberry, Grape juice, Goldenrod, Rowan berries, Sloes, Rosehip etc

If you are interested in foraging the Woodland Trust have an amazing directory of what you can find:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/foraging/>

Fresh fruit and fresh ingredients in ink mean it doesn't last long and could be light sensitive. To preserve and store any natural inks you would add gum Arabic.

In addition to looking at natural inks, you can use food colouring as an alternative. Food Colouring contains curcumin (yellow orange like turmeric) and indigo carmine (blue from salt)