

Trees Used for Dye



Alder (*Alnus rugosa*) bark and cones produced a black dye used to color coarse cloth, caps and hose. The inner bark of the alder, both green and dried, was pounded into shreds and placed in water to steep. It produced a yellow dye. The cloth was added while the dye was hot and was let boil. Nothing was needed to set the color. The outer bark, when boiled, produced a red dye.

Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) was used for a variety of purposes. The green rind of the nuts was rubbed on ringworms. Twig bark was charred and used in water for snakebite. The hulls of ripened nuts were used to dye wool brown and the bark of the tree was charred to obtain a black dye.

Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) bark was used by Native Americans in poultices and teas to treat a variety of illnesses. Bark, with a little grindstone dust or rock dust, in hot water produced a rich, mahogany color. The "dust" helped to "set" the color. The dye was applied to wool and cotton.

Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) bark, wood and twigs were used by Native Americans in medicinal concoctions to treat ailments ranging from rheumatism to nervousness. The inner bark produced a mahogany color.

Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) bark produced a rich, dark blue color often used by Native Americans. They discovered that rotten maple wood produced an especially beautiful purple dye. They searched for wood that was very old and very rotten. To make the dye, they put a double handful of rotten wood and a single handful of grindstone dust into very hot water. Once the color was obtained, the fabric to be dyed was placed in the water and boiled.

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) trees were used for a number of purposes by Native Americans. The tea made from roots was both medicinal as well as refreshing. Wood chips were used to keep moths from eating woolen fabrics. The bark produced a lasting orange color that did not fade in the sun. The Indians added urine to the dye water to further enhance the fine color.

White Oak (*Quercus alba*) bark was used to dye wool brown. The color did not fade in the sun. Oak galls were used to make a black dye.

