

Plant the rainbow

Learn to pigment textiles with plants from your garden

BY NIKKI DAVIDSON

Filled with mismatched jars and containers, plant clippings and even two lounging resident felines, the workshop of Astoria artist Iris Sullivan Daire looks like the lab of a mad scientist.

She slips on oversized rubber, pigment-stained gloves and plunges her hands into a large mystery vat of liquid. The scrap fabric she pulls out of the pot shape-shifts from yellow-green to blue in front of her eyes.

“It’s magic,” she said.

The mystifying effect isn’t new, it’s been around for about 4,000 years. It’s the oxidation process that happens when fibers are removed from an indigo dyeing vat, the same plant people used to tint clothes in ancient India, East Asia and Egypt.

Living in a world where most textiles are now dyed with synthetics, Sullivan Daire has become a master of using her natural elements to create color. She’s passionate about sharing the techniques with others and will be offering classes at the Sou’Wester Arts & Ecology Center in Seaview, Washington, from Tuesday to Oct. 16.

Many of the supplies for the classes will come from her own garden, where she grows 15 different plants to create pigments. What she can’t get from her own land, she forages for during her daily walks. Her local favorites are fireweed, red alder and sitka spruce.

“Red alder is the one that is dominant

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ABOVE: Iris Sullivan Daire will often forage for natural materials to create dye. Her favorite local plants are fireweed, red alder and sitka spruce.



LEFT: A palette of colors in Sullivan Daire’s studio made from natural dyes.

Photos by Nikki Davidson

Natural dyeing classes at Sou’Wester Arts & Ecology Center Center

1306 39th Place, Seaview, Washington

Saturday workshops: Sept. 25, Oct. 2, 9 and 16 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Youth after-school programs: Tuesday to Sept. 23, Oct. 5 to Oct. 7, Oct. 12 to Oct. 14. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

souwester-arts-ecology-center.square.site/

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