

here,” she said. “You can use the cones to dye with, the leaves to dye with and you can use the bark off of your firewood to dye with.”

She said she’s most excited to teach after-school programs at the Sou’Wester, eager for the opportunity to teach kids that every color of the rainbow can be created from just three different plants. The classes will be held three days a week for three weeks.

“If you get exposed to it, it’s totally exciting,” she said.

Sullivan Daire served as a nature guide in college and feels her workshops are essentially guiding young students through nature in a different way. She plans to focus her lesson plans on a new color each week, and give her class hands-on experience to create something of their own.

She’ll also be hosting Saturday natural dyeing classes at the Sou’Wester for students 12 and older. The weekend workshops will cover everything from indigo dyeing, flower printing on silk pillowcases and eco-printing tablecloths.

The workshop series comes at a time when many people are becoming more aware of where their clothes come from. According to a 2017 report from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, textile production pollutes water and generates more emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. The dyeing industry uses more than 8,000 chemicals and many, including sulfur, arsenic and formaldehyde are harmful to human health.

Sullivan Daire only uses non-toxic natural dyes.

She believes introducing people to more sustainable alternatives like natural dyeing can make a big difference in attitude. She doesn’t believe in shaming people for past purchases.

“Just having one textile that you know the source of, that’s meaningful to you and enriches your life in huge ways, that’s the sort of experience that encourages people to seek that out more,” she said. “I’d rather do that than just telling people ‘everything in your closet is bad and wrong, you’re bad and wrong for having bought these things.’”



Photos by Nikki Davidson

ABOVE: Sullivan Daire works along art pieces, plant clippings and resident felines at Dream Bird Studio in Astoria. LEFT: Sullivan Daire removes a textile piece from a bath of indigo dye. BELOW LEFT: Sullivan Daire inspects a rainbow of natural dyed textile pieces hanging in her studio. BELOW: Sullivan Daire paints her pieces with natural resist components before dyeing them to create pieces of art.

