

# “Looking OUT THE BACK DOOR...”

## The Sac County Conservation Board’s Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2011

Volume 24/ Issue 30



### Wild Colors

Fall is a great time of the year to pick wild colors. People gather wild foods but what about dyes? After following some simple processes you could have your own wild colors. I love when I can combine my hobbies and my love for my work. My main hobby is spinning and other fiber arts like knitting, crocheting and felting and basketry. All of these crafts are enhanced by the use of wild colors. There are some general rules to follow when dealing with natural dyes. First of all remember to never take over 10% of the plants from a wild area, this ensures that you will get to harvest a crop next year without decimating the plant’s population in that area. In general, when you harvest plants the blossoms should be in full bloom, berries ripe and nuts mature. Once you have your plants, put them in the pot. You will need a large soup pot, this pot should never again be used for cooking food. Larger plants will need to be cut up into smaller pieces. Estimate the amount of plant material that is in your pot then add double that amount of water so that plants are covered. Get the solution to a boil then simmer it for an hour, strain the plant materials. The resulting liquid is your dye bath! this time you add any mordents if directed. A mordent is an additive, which helps to adhere the color to the fiber/fabric. In general the most commonly used mordent is Alum. (found at your local grocery store and is used for pickling) A general rule of thumb is to divide the weight of the material to dye by four. Weight out that much alum mordant or you can be daring and add a dash here and there but to be aware that too much mordent, especially if you get into the tin, copper, and iron mordents can hurt your fibers. Once your bath is ready add the fabric and simmer on low, for a stronger color leave your material in the dye pot over-

night. The fabric/fiber should be pre soaked in luke-warm water before entering the dye bath, this helps the fiber to better absorb the dye.) A word of warning - Wear gloves ,so your hands aren’t dyed and do not let the water boil if you are using wool as it will felt. Also, the color is always darker when wet so don’t be deceived. Lastly, make sure to thoroughly rinse cloth when it is done and do not wash it with other clothing or materials as it still may shed color. Some of my favorite natural dyes are walnut and hickory husks, nettles, elderberries, and Goldenrod. The easiest dyes come from the Black Walnut. These trees are common in many backyards. They have large compound leaves and thick ridged bark. The nuts are green (although old ones turn brown) and have their own unique smell, many kids don’t like it but I think it smells like cleaner. The nuts are starting to drop right now so this is a good time to walk in your local woods. These nuts are edible and you will find out about their dyeing power when you are pulling the husk off to find a dark stain on your hands. The first step is to gather up the walnuts, gathering a grocery bags worth will give you a good amount for a soup pot’s worth of dye bath. If you plan on eating the nut it would be worth it to get it out before boiling the husks. There are many ways to do this, hammering the nut out though a nut sized hole in a board or rolling/crushing it underfoot on a hard surface. Throw the husks in a pot..Cont. on pg 5



Black Walnut

Fact Files.....	Page 2
Upcoming Programs.....	Page 3
Kid’s Korner.....	Page 4
Eyes to the Skies.....	Page 5
Reason for the Season...	Page 6

## Director's Notes

It is hard to believe it has been almost a year since moving into the new Sac County Conservation Center. The staff has adjusted to the "abundance" of space compared to the old office and are getting used to having people stop by and visit on a regular basis. Due to a grant from the Gilbert and Barbra Renze Foundation we are able to proceed with the Children's Area at the Conservation Center. In addition, the Introduction Display and Crawl Thru Log are being built and will be installed by spring. These two were funded in part by a Sac County Foundation Grant. If you would like to assist in sponsoring additional displays and exhibits please contact our office. On the outside of the center additional landscaping is planned for the fall and next spring. A butterfly garden and prairie seeding, to name a couple. If you haven't had the chance to stop by the Conservation Center please plan it. Next year marks the 50th Anniversary of the Sac County Conservation Board. We have begun to think about events, programs, ect. that we will be holding to celebrate the event. Keep watching for the information in the months to come. The Sauk Rail Trail has seen its use increase with the opening of the newly paved section from Carnarvon to Maple River If you have a chance to utilize the trail this fall keep in mind that hunting is allowed on a good portion of that trail. Finally, with our annual Halloween Night Hike coming up there is one change I would like to mention. This year we will be holding the hike on one night only, Saturday October 15th, the Pumpkin Carving contest will still be held on Friday October 14th. Reservations are required and you can contact our office to obtain them. If you get a chance this fall plan on visiting one of your Sac County parks!

## Looking into the fact files!

### *Bur Oak*



*(Quercus Macrocarpa)*

- Iowa's official state tree
- 70-90 feet tall
- 60-80 feet wide
- Long strong limbs used by turkeys as roosting spots
- Acorn caps have frills at the margins
- The Acorn Weevil lays an egg in a maturing acorn high in the tree, where the larvae eat the nut meat inside.
- Fall colors range from copper yellow to brown
- Squirrels, deer, turkey and many other mammals eat the nuts.
- A savanna species, these native trees have thick quark like bark that makes it tolerant to fire which it once had to deal with on a regular basis.
- Many oaks have lost lower branches in parks due to other trees encroaching and shading lower branches.

## Thank You

- We would like to thank Secondary Roads for the many things they do for us
- Thank You, Jackson 4-H Club for installing the Wildflower ID Garden
- Marjo's by Engel for their donations of flowers to our flower beds
- The Extension office for use of equipment and help at the fishing clinic.
- Carroll, Crawford and Buena Vista County Conservation Boards for the use of their equipment.
- All presenters at Conservation Field Days and 4th Grade field days
- Prairie Lakes AEA for use of equipment
- The Cherokee Observatory for program
- Iowa DNR for Jowater training program
- Tracy Pickhinke and Barb Bloom for EE donations
- To Sandi Huster for library books
- Marlin Pellersels for the use of his pond
- Christa Kranig, Jerry and Peggy Niles for their volunteer time keeping the conservation center open on Sundays.
- To everyone who helped with summer camps!



# Upcoming Programs

---

---

## The Month of September— Our Natural Parks Collection—

This collection was put together by Craig Meyers who has taken professional photographs at various national parks. This collection can be seen at the Conservation Center from during regular work hours, please call 712-662-4530 for current hours.

### September 10th—Sac County Outdoor Sports Event

At this event, kids aged 12-18 can try out trap shooting, archery, sling shots, bb guns and many other outdoor shooting event. This event will run from 11-2 pm and will be held at the M & G Gun Club located west of Schaller on D 15.

### September 11th- Monarch Tagging

Catch and tag live Monarch butterflies and learn why we do it at this program. The program begins at 5 pm at Reiff Park located just south of Early. Call 712-662-4530 to sign up.

### September 17th— Fishing Club Meeting

The Fishing club will meet at Blackhawk Lake from 10-11:30, we will tie flies and get a chance to use them to fish. Fishing poles will be provided but you are welcome to bring your own. Please call 712-662-4530 or 712-662-7131 to learn more about the fishing club or for directions to the park.

### October 14th- Pumpkin Carving Contest

Bring your carving tools, pumpkins and creativity as we will carve the night away. The carving contest will take place in the garage at Hagge Park and will start at 6 pm with judging starting at 7 pm There will be candy available after carving and prizes are awarded to three age groups from which winners will be picked. Then you will get to see your pumpkin on the annual Halloween Night Hike.

### October 15th -Halloween Night Hike

This year come out to Hagge Park for wonderful environmental skits with characters from your favorite children's TV shows! Also enjoy marshmallows, hot cocoa, popcorn and hotdogs. You will meet characters like Curious George, Arther and more. After your guided hike warm up in the shelter house and let the kids get their face painted. In order to reserve your spot call 712-662-4530. The hike times run in 10 minute intervals and the hike takes about an hour. Up to 30 people can go at one time. Popular times fill quickly so make sure to get your reservations in.

### November 18th - Wild Dyes

Come learn about some of the wild, natural dyes that can be made from plants all around you, from those found in natural areas to those in your own back yard. Bring a prewashed cotton or other natural material and try your hand at dyeing too. This program will be on November 18th from 7-8 pm at Hagge Park. You must reserve your spot - call 712-662-4530.

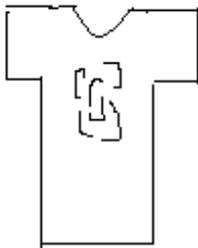
**November - Ducks Unlimited Banquet**-Help support wetlands all over the United States. Ducks utilize all of the very important wetland habitat's that DU puts on the ground during their spring and fall migration. Hunter or just lover of wild things come check out this banquet and feel good that you helped out the ducks. For tickets or more information contact Bernie Kofron at 673-6649

# Kid's Korner

Make your own Wild Tie Dye T-shirt! Using the techniques available on the first page make at least two different colors. Find a t-shirt and wrap it according the directions below then squirt dye on the shirt using an old dishwashing soap bottle and wrap the shirt in plastic wrap or a plastic bag and heat it. You can heat it by leaving it in the sun all day or by using a double boiler and steaming it.

## The brain of squished tie

For this technique start in the middle of the t-shirt and pinch the material until it bunches up, then keep pinching until the t-shirt looks like a ball. Then wrap the shirt in rubber bands.



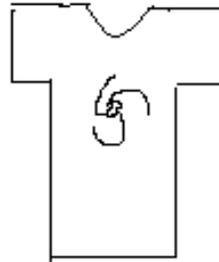
Pinch and gather



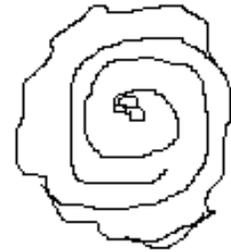
Wrap with rubber bands

## The Swirl

For this technique start in the middle of the t-shirt and pinch then twist the shirt. Keep twisting until the whole shirt is swirled into a circle, then secure with rubber bands.



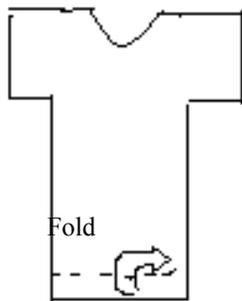
Pinch and twist



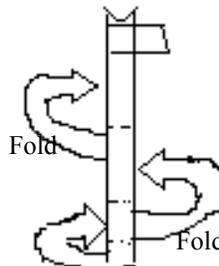
Wrap with rubber bands

## The Fold

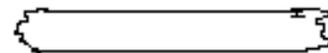
For this technique start at the top or bottom or even edge of the shirt. You can fold the shirt in half or leave the shirt whole. When you fold the shirt it will create a mirrored effect. Simply start at an end and fold the shirt about an inch then in accordion style folding— fold the whole fold over to the to the other side of the shirt. Keep doing this until you have one long piece of folded t-shirt and then secure it with rubber bands



Fold



Fold



Wrap with rubber bands

Continued from page 1 ..

and add cover with water boil then strain them. This dye bath needs no mordent although you can add alum if you wish. I mentioned that hickory hulls also work well, they will give a lighter brown than the walnuts.

The most common hickory tree in our parks is the Shagbark Hickory which is easy to identify as the bark looks shaggy and about to flake off. Complete the same steps and add alum and you will be ready to dye. Other plants that can give you browns are: Acorns, Oak bark, Juniper Berries. Sometimes the Goldenrod, Docks, Coneflowers and St. John's Wart. The next plant is the nettle (Urtica), there are two common nettles found in our parks. Stinging nettle and wood nettle are found in

our riparian parks. They both have serrated margins, however wood nettle has wider, rounder leaves. Nettles



Shagbark Hickory



Stinging Nettle

need to be harvested with gloves due to their stinging hairs. When I dye plants I add a splash of vinegar (aprox. 1/4 or less of the pot), chop up plants and boil water to make your dye bath. Fabrics/ fibers will turn greenish (shade will depend on quantity and length of time left in dye bath). However you can get yellow if you add a mordent called Alum. There are many plants that can give you a green color such as Yar-



Elderberry

row leaves, Queen Anne's Lace, and Black Eyed Susan's. Elderberries (Sambucus nigra) is a large bush found in many of our ditches and in open park areas. This bush has a large umbel of purple berries, which is the part a dyer will want. If the wildlife have not gotten to them, the berries should be ripe now. Boil the berries (and I feel it is good to crush them up a bit) add alum as a mordent and the product is a violet color. Add alum and salt (about 1/2



Goldenrod

Dogwood bark or berries, mulberries, wild grapes, or raspberries.

Goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*) in their many forms grow in our ditches and open places. They are currently blooming, their bloom time runs from August into late September. Pick the flowers only, add alum and I think it helps to add a bit of cream of tartar. (found at the local grocery store) This will produce a lemon yellow to golden yellow color. There are other plants that can give varieties of yellows, they are the flowers of Yarrow, Dandelions and St. John's Wart or the wood of the Osage Orange, and Burdocks.

No matter what plant you use (make sure it is a non-poisonous plant and always work in a well ventilated area) to make color, wild dyes are a fun! Try new plants and you just may be surprised at the color you get! Enjoy the new colors of wild plants on your fabrics/fibers as well as the beauties of fall in the wild areas you visit to harvest these plants.

Wood Nettle

## Eyes To The Skies

- September 16th– New Moon
- September 22nd– Autumnal Equinox– Equal amounts of days and nights
- September 29th– Uranus in closest approach– Due to distance it will only appear as a bluish dot.
- September 30th– Full Moon
- October 15– New Moon
- October 21-22nd– Peak of Orionids Meteor Shower– This shower can be seen from October 17-25 . During the peak of this average meteor shower about 20 meteors can be seen in an hour. Best viewing should be to the east after midnight.
- October 29th– Full Moon
- November 13th– New Moon
- November 17th-18th– Leonid Meteor Shower peaks- This is a good shower which can produce up to 40 meteors per hour. It can be seen from 13-20th. With the crescent moon setting early in the evening this will be a good one to get out and photograph.
- November 27– Saturn meets Venus– These two bright planets will be within 1 degree of each other. The best time to view it will be just before sunrise looking east .
- November 28th– Full moon with partial eclipse– The partial prenumbral eclipse will happen at moonset

## The Reason for the Colorful Season

Fall is one of the most colorful seasons in Iowa. Known for its deep reds, yellows and oranges fall gets people off the couches and either walking or driving around to see the fall color before winter wipes the landscape with a white film. The colorful patchwork of a hillside resonates in our eyes, but what causes these color changes and why do the trees go through this process year after year? The first thing to cover is the function of leaves. They are the food processing plant or energy producing part of the plant. Leaves are able to take in CO<sub>2</sub>, water and sunlight along with mineral and convert it into sugar through the process of photosynthesis. This term means “putting together with light” and it converts the raw materials into Oxygen and Glucose. (a form of sugar) This all takes place inside of the Chlorophyll. The chlorophyll is located in special organelles within the cell called chloroplast, chlorophyll is what gives plants their green color. When the lengths of the day (photoperiods) shorten and the nights get cooler this triggers a response in the tree to stop the leaves from producing sugar and to prepare for dormancy. The tree will slowly withdraw nitrogen and phosphorus and store them in the twigs and branches during the winter, this along with lack of light due to shorter days cause the slow-down and eventual stop to all chlorophyll production. A deciduous tree drops its leaves because during the winter it can not absorb enough moisture from the frozen ground for the process of photosynthesis as well the threat of heavy snow piling on leaves and potentially causing damage to the limbs. Part of the process of dormancy where the tree lives off the energy stored in its roots is to shutdown the chlorophyll. When these cells breakdown we can see the colors that have been in the leaf all along but were covered up by the chlorophyll cells. There are three pigments that are responsible for fall’s colors, they are: carotenoids, tannins, and anthocyanins. Carotenoid pigments create the yellow and orange colors, they are always in the leaf as they aid chlorophyll in photosynthesis. Some of the trees that show this color in the fall are the sycamores, birches, aspen, ashes and many more. However some of the reds and purples in trees like maples are caused by trapped glucose that have been exposed to sunlight and cool nights. The anthocyanins are a prime example of this and create the pink and purple leaves of sugar and red maple, sumac, dogwood, and many others. They occur when sugars combine with chemicals within the plant called anthocyanidin which are formed inside the vacuole (the central sack in the cell which supports the cell as well as other function) and are exposed to the cool air. The intensity of the color can vary depending on the pH of the cell. This chemical is usually produced in fall and not present in the leaf prior to that time. Tannins are the browns in oaks, which are a result of waste materials that get trapped in the leaf. These compounds are always present in the leaves, but can only be seen when chlorophyll disappears from leaves. Tannins are very bitter and they cause the color and flavor of tea. The combination of all these color causing activities in the trees is what gives us the beautiful fall foliage that is enjoyed year after year.

### Summer Staff

This year, you may have met some of our wonderful summer staff while camping at your local county parks or at summer camp programs. Our summer rangers were Joel and Adam. Joel Schwarzkopf who attended Iowa State will return there this fall. Adam Haakenson has graduated from Iowa State. If you visited Grant Park this year most likely you saw our Grant Park Attendant, Roger Huster. He returned to work this summer and we hope to see him again next year. Melissa and Terry Rath were the hosts at Grant Park, who worked hard to keep campers safe and happy. Jim and Nancy Muesberger were the camp ground hosts for Hagge Park. They worked hard all summer keeping campers at Hagge comfortable and welcomed. We would like to thank all of our summer staff for their hard work! We truly appreciated your time and dedication.



## **Sac County Conservation Board**

### **Board Members**

Rich Feilmeier—Early— Chairperson  
Barb Bloom-Odebolt-Vice Chairperson  
Andy Meredith-Lake View—Secretary  
Kenny Bentsen—Sac City—Member  
Dean Stock—Lake View—Member

### **Staff**

Chris Bass—Executive Director  
Sandi Huster—Secretary  
Rene Stroud—Naturalist

### **Meetings**

Regular board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM at the Hagge Park office. These meetings are open to the public.

Hagge Park Office Phone: (712) 662-4530  
Email: saccocon@frontiernet.net

The Sac County Conservation Board in the provisions of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age, or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Sac County Conservation Board Office or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240