April Dye Plant of the Month: Dyer’s Chamomile, Golden Marguerite
*(Anthemis tinctoria, sometimes shown as Cota tinctoria)*
by Janet Bare


Plant Family: Compositae, Composite Family
(also called Asteraceae)

Description: A short-lived perennial herb, often treated as a biennial, 2-3 ft tall, with aromatic, silvery-green, feathery foliage. Flowers yellow, persisting from spring to frost.

Origin and Current Range: Native to sunny, rocky terrain of southern Europe, the Mediterranean region and western Asia. Introduced and naturalized in much of the U.S., especially in northern states, and in southern Canada.

Reproduction and Cultivation: Reproduces by seed, but will also spread by creeping runners. Prefers sunny locations, but is tolerant of various soils. Can be propagated by dividing the root balls in the spring. Dead-heading (or harvesting) the flowering heads prolongs the blooming period. Keep well watered.

Dye Color and Parts Used for Dye: Flowers, leaves and stems can be used to achieve yellow, orange-yellow and buff dyes in wool mordanted with alum or alum and cream of tartar. Plant parts can be harvested throughout the growing season, according to Jenny Dean (ref. 3). Eva Lambert & Tracy Kendall (ref. 6) recommend using only freshly harvested flowers.

Other Information: Dyer’s chamomile was used as a dye in Medieval times, although apparently not as often as other traditional sources of yellow dyes, such as weld. Seeds of this plant have been found in excavations in southwestern Finland dated back to the 14th to 16th centuries, suggesting use as a dye plant and/or medicinal plant. In more recent times, laboratory tests have shown that phenolic compounds and flavonoids extracted from these plants to be effective, at relatively low doses, against bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and some compounds (especially conduritol and patulin) extracted from the plant are good scavengers of free radicals(ref. 9). One study (ref. 5) undertaken to determine color fastness of dyer’s chamomile as a possible commercial dye plant determined that the dye holds up well against washing, rubbing and sweat, but is not as light-fast as would be desired for commercial dyes. Field studies showed that the plants could be successfully grown for 1 or 2 years, and the authors recommended more studies as this might be a commercially successful crop.

Note to reader: Please see the following resources and annotations for significantly more details, illustrations, etc., than what I have summarized above.
References:


11. USDA Plants Database: http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=ANTI [Includes map of current distribution in North America]
