Dye Plant of the Month: Red Amaranth, blood amaranth, Hopi red dye
(Amaranthus cruentus; hybrids of A. cruentus x A. powellii also available)

Plant Family: Amaranthaceae

Description: Annual; multi-branching herb up to 9 ft tall, topped with spikes of small flowers intermingled with red to maroon or dark purple bracts.

Origin and Current Range: Amaranth is native to the Americas, and is believed to have been wild harvested before being domesticated around 4,000 BC in Mexico’s Tehuacan Valley. From there, it is said to have spread to the Southwestern United States via ancient trading routes. The Hopi name for this plant is komo. It is cultivated as an ornamental and for its edible seeds almost world wide from tropical to warm-temperate regions.


Reproduction and Cultivation: Reproduces from seeds and is self-sowing. Start seeds outdoors after all danger of frost is passed, or start indoors and transplant to outside beds.

Dye Color and Parts Used for Dye: Red dyes produced from flower clusters, leaves and stems. The Hopi used the colorful flower bracts to color their thin, stone-cooked piki bread. This plant is not addressed in most books on dye plants, so we will be covering new ground with plants from our dye garden! Several references indicate that using high temperature baths may not be the best approach for dyeing with this plant.

Other Information: The tasty seeds can be eaten raw, sprouted, toasted, roasted, or ground into flour for baking. Amaranth leaves have a flavor similar to spinach and can be harvested at any time of the growing season.

References:


4. The Druid Garden website: Information on harvesting the seeds to eat.  

