Dye Plant of the Month: Cota, Navajo tea, Hopi tea, greenthread
(Thelesperma filifolium)

Plant Family: Asteraceae (Composite Family)

Description: Annual, winter annual or short-lived perennial, slender plants up to 16” or taller; leaves with narrow, threadlike lobes; heads with yellow ray flowers and yellow or reddish-brown disk flowers all summer and into the fall.

We are also growing a second species of cota in the dye garden: Thelesperma megapotamicum, also called greenthread, Hopi tea, or Navajo tea. It is a perennial, and the yellow or reddish-brown flower heads lack ray flowers.

Origin and Current Range: Thelesperma filifolium is native to Colorado, north to Wyoming and South Dakota, east to Missouri, Arkansas and Louisiana, and south to New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. T. megapotamicum is native to a larger part of the central and western U.S.

Habitat: Full sun; dry, clay or rocky soils, often on limestone.


Dye Color and Parts Used for Dye: Yellow to orange dyes produced on wools mordanted with alum, from flowers, stems and leaves. Here is an example of colors we achieved this fall using only the flowers. We were able to get very nice results using as many as three extractions from the dried flowers.

Results from First Extraction:
Other Information: Flowers, stems and leaves of several species of *Thelesperma* were used by Native Americans of the Southwest, including the Navajo and Hopi, to make teas. *Thelesperma megapotamicum* is now grown commercially on the Colorado Plateau in New Mexico.

References:


