Dye Plant of the Month: Marigold, French Marigold (*Tagetes patula*)

Plant Family: Asteraceae (Compositae)

Description: Annual herb, gland-dotted and aromatic with pinnately lobed leaves; plants 8 – 48” tall; flower heads yellow to deep red or red-brown, in late spring – early fall.

Origin and Current Range: Native to the Mexican highlands and other parts of Latin America. Naturalized in some parts of California.

Habitat: Full sun; tolerant of many types of soils but prefers good drainage.

Reproduction and Cultivation: Reproduces from seeds. Can be started inside or directly outside.

Dye Color and Parts Used for Dye: Fresh or dried flowers produce yellow, gold, old gold, buff and orange dyes on mordanted wool, silk, and cotton. Jeanine Reagan notes that fiber died with marigolds is especially good for overdying with indigo or saxon blue for greens. All parts of the plant except the root can be used for dyeing. Pick off the flower heads regularly throughout the growing season and use them fresh or dry. In the fall pull up the whole plants, cut off the roots and use the plant tops either fresh or dried. To dye, cover the plant material with water and simmer for 30 minutes. Strain off the colored liquid and add mordanted fiber. Simmer 15-60 minutes. Marigolds have a strong smell so work with good ventilation. The photo below, provided by Donna Brown, shows several examples of yarn and fabric dyed with marigold.

Other Information: The plants can cause dermatitis in some individuals. They are often used as a companion plant with tomatoes, egg plant, chili peppers, and potatoes to deter common insect pests and nematodes. Because the roots exude an antibacterial substance, they should not be planted near legumes. The plants provide food for some Lepidoptera caterpillars and nectar for butterflies and are sometimes planted in butterfly gardens.
References:


