

# IYRP Natural Dye Recipes

Natural dyes offer a tactile, place-based way to connect with the plants, colors, and cultural traditions of rangeland ecosystems. These simple inks made from sagebrush, rabbitbrush, blue flax, yarrow, and juniper berries demonstrate how everyday materials carry stories of land, seasonality, and stewardship. Each recipe is designed for accessibility, safety, and community use, encouraging partners to explore local flora while honoring ecological care. When harvested responsibly, these dyes invite hands-on creativity rooted in the textures, aromas, and colors of rangelands across the Western U.S., Canada, and Northern Mexico.

## Recipe 1: Sagebrush Tea Ink

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups sagebrush leaves (fresh or dried)
- 4 cups water
- 1 tbsp vinegar (mordant)

### Instructions:

1. Boil water and add sagebrush leaves.
2. Simmer for 30–45 minutes.
3. Strain out the plant material.
4. Add vinegar to fix the color.
5. Use as ink for writing or painting.

## Recipe 2: Rabbitbrush Bloom Ink

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups rabbitbrush flower heads (fresh or dried)
- 4 cups water
- 1 tbsp vinegar (mordant)

### Instructions:

1. Gently rinse the rabbitbrush blooms to remove dust or debris.
2. Bring the water to a boil and add the flower heads.
3. Simmer for 30–45 minutes, until the liquid takes on a strong yellow color.
4. Strain out the plant material.
5. Add the vinegar to help fix the color.
6. Use as ink for writing, drawing, or light watercolor washes.

## Recipe 3: Blue Flax Petal Ink

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh blue flax petals
- 4 cups water
- 1 tbsp vinegar (mordant)

### Instructions:

1. Gently rinse the blue flax petals to remove dust or debris.
2. Bring the water to a boil and add the petals.
3. Simmer for 20–30 minutes, until the water turns pale blue or blue-grey.
4. Strain out the plant material.
5. Add the vinegar to help fix the color.
6. Use as ink for writing, drawing, or light washes.

#### **Recipe 4: Yarrow Leaf & Flower Ink**

##### **Ingredients:**

- 2 cups yarrow leaves and flower heads (fresh or dried)
- 4 cups water
- 1 tbsp vinegar (mordant)

##### **Instructions:**

1. Rinse the yarrow lightly to remove dust or debris.
2. Bring the water to a boil and add the leaves and flower heads.
3. Simmer for 30–40 minutes, until the liquid turns yellow-green.
4. Strain out the plant material.
5. Add the vinegar to help set the color.
6. Use as ink for writing, drawing, or washes with an earthy yellow tone.

#### **Recipe 5: Juniper Berry Ink**

##### **Ingredients:**

- 1 cup juniper berries (ripe, blue-purple; harvested sparingly)
- 2 cups water
- 1 tbsp vinegar (mordant)

##### **Instructions:**

1. Lightly crush the juniper berries with a spoon to release their natural pigments.
2. Bring the water to a boil, then add the crushed berries.
3. Reduce heat and simmer for 30–40 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Strain out berries through fine mesh or cheesecloth.
5. Add vinegar to help fix the color.
6. Allow to cool completely, then use as ink for writing, stamping, or soft washes.

#### **Safe Harvesting Notes**

##### **Sagebrush**

- Harvest only small amounts from healthy, abundant stands.
- Clip sprigs rather than pulling or breaking stems.
- Avoid disturbing root systems or old-growth shrubs.
- Do not collect from culturally sensitive sites or areas under Tribal stewardship without permission.

##### **Rabbitbrush**

- Collect only a few flower heads per plant to preserve pollinator resources.

- Choose plants away from roadsides or recently sprayed areas.
- Avoid harvesting during or after rain when blooms are delicate and easily damaged.
- Leave plenty of blossoms for wildlife and seed production.

### **Blue Flax**

- Harvest sparingly — blue flax is a short-lived perennial that relies on reseeding.
- Clip only a few flower clusters or petals from any single plant.
- Avoid harvesting entire stems or seed heads; leave them for regeneration.
- Take from widespread, healthy patches only, not small or fragmented ones.

### **Yarrow**

- Clip only the upper portion of stems, leaving the bulk of the plant intact.
- Harvest from large, vigorous patches and rotate sites to prevent overuse.
- Avoid pulling or digging plants; yarrow spreads via rhizomes and should remain undisturbed.
- Do not gather from polluted soils, roadsides, or areas heavily grazed by livestock.

### **Juniper Berries**

- Harvest only a *very small handful* of ripe berries from any single tree; berries may take up to two years to mature.
- Never strip branches, shake branches, or remove large quantities—berries are a crucial winter food source for birds and mammals.
- Clip or gently pluck only the ripe, blue-purple berries; leave green, immature cones untouched.
- Avoid harvesting from drought-stressed, isolated, or damaged trees.
- Know your species and context: juniper is culturally significant for many Tribal Nations; always follow local protocols and avoid collecting from ceremonial or protected sites.
- Gather only from clean areas—avoid roadside, industrial, or contaminated locations.