

SONG
OF
YELLOW

A Celebration of Traditional Dyeing

Natty Mark Samuels

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Introduction

You may ask dear reader, why yellow and not purple, orange, or any other colour. The inspiration of yellow came from my recent and on-going occupancy of a studio flat, which I have adorned with green and yellow (lime and lemon) items and furniture, as a kind of extension of my citrus advocacy. And as yellow is my second favourite colour after green and as the former is the brighter of the two, I decided to use that one to entitle this homage. After all, in the domestic scenario, what looks brighter than a bowl of lemons?

We are acquainted with the medicinal benefits of herbs and the culinary pleasures they offer, but less so with their past paramountcy in the world of cloth and colour. In the tales of textiles, they were once a major feature in every chapter. But as with the coming of allopathic medicine, which saw the dismissal of herbal remedies, so the advent of the synthetic dye, heralded the disregard for the herbal one.

I have enjoyed my exploration and discovery of the wider dyeing traditions. Previously, I'd only been aware of the African ones, such as Bogolanfani, the mudcloth of Mali and Burkina Faso and Adire, the indigo cloth of Nigeria. So, in recognition of all traditional dyers, past and present, I am happy to present to you, Song of Yellow.

Dedication

to my multi-talented cousin

Sharon McIntyre

who introduced me to this form of online publishing
and encouraged me to share my work in this format.

SONG OF YELLOW

Yarrow

You can dye with me in winter,
As well as during summer,
For I am Yarrow.
Use me in the days of sunshine,
And in those times of snow.

Dry me,
Dye with me in December.

Bring me your wool,
To transform into yellow,
Or orange or brown.
I will brighten the dreary,
When your head is hung down.

Dry me,
Dye with me in December.

Common Toadflax

I'm *Lingaria vulgaris*,
Known as Common Toadflax.
Ready for the woman,
Who wants to modify,
Her chinos and her slacks.

She's a lover of colour,
Yellow her favourite one.
She reflects the rainbow,
A little kaleidoscope,
Colour is her passport to fun

Marigold

In Asia, I have adorned sacred places: I am Marigold. My story is long, but only half of it is told. For I have lutein, that great carotenoid, giver of natural pigment. Follow my Yellow Gold Road, to a place of visual fulfilment.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Liquorice

I am Liquorice,
Possessor of flavonoids,
Such as one called liquirtin.
As well as in sweets and toothpaste,
Use me in the process of dyeing.

Take of my root,
As they did in ancient times,
In Egypt, Greece and Rome.
I am one of the givers:
Take a gift from my rhizome.

Yellow Flag

They call me Yellow Flag,
Iris Pseudacorus,
Bringer of yellow to your textiles.
You'll see me by the river,
When you walk or sit awhile.

Iris Pseudacorus;
I'm a part of the singers,
In the chorus that sings of yellow.

I like to seek out shade,
As well as the water's edge:
The marsh area and the wetland.
Just like the grey heron,
At the water you'll see me stand.

Iris Pseudacorus;
I'm a part of the singers,
In the chorus that sings of yellow.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Goldenrod

I like the forest and the meadow,
I am Goldenrod.
See me in the summer,
Emblazon your garden,
With the nutrients from the sod.

Whether my cousin Canadian,
Or little ol' me.
We will do wonders with wool,
Our long-time interaction,
In the yellow revelry.

To intensify the colour,
Sometimes they'll add lye.
Maybe soda water.
See the grinning schoolboy,
With his brighter yellow tie.

Turmeric

Turmeric

I am turmeric.
And the stain on your hands,
Can bring change to your clothes.

Voices

Turmeric, vinegar and water,
After the boiling, let the pot simmer.

Turmeric

Your cottons and your silks,
In a bath of stainless steel,
Ready for metamorphosis.

Voices

Turmeric, vinegar and water,
After the boiling, let the pot simmer.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Weld

I am liked by the beekeeper,
Garden landscaper too:
For I am Weld.
Come pick me from the wasteland,
Where my root is often held.

Dwarf Elder

They use my berries for blue,
Stem and leaves for yellow:
I am Dwarf Elder.
You'll find me in the moist,
In Africa, Europe and Asia.

Ragwort and Sawort

Ragwort

I am *Senecio jacobea*,
Otherwise known as Ragwort

Sawort

I am *Serratula tinctoria*
Affectionately known as Sawort

Ragwort and Sawort

We have come to alter,
And yellow is our colour.
So bring your cloth,
And pick a flower.

Broom

See me in the wild,
See me in the garden,
See me from May to June.
See me in the shrub,
See me in the chorus line,
Singing the Yellow Tune.
I am the one called Broom.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Lady Bedstraw

Whether from sand dune or grassland,
July or in August,
I'm part of the transformation team.
I also am a bringer of yellow:
I am Lady Bedstraw.

Whether coastal or riverside,
From field or from meadow,
I'm part of the conversion crew.
I am also a bringer of yellow:
I am Lady Bedstraw.

Dandelion

My roots for brown,
My flowers for yellow,
I am Dandelion.
I'm everywhere,
Truly global,
Maybe also on Orion!

Mango

Someone will bring alum and soda ash, I shall provide mangiferin, which you will find within my leaves. Some know me as *Mangifera indica*, I am Mango: and yellow is what I bequeath.

Jackfruit

As jackfruit,
I go deeper with aluminium.
I dyed the robe of the Buddhist monk;
In Thailand and Myanmar,
Sri Lanka and Cambodia:
Times of the sacred dunk.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Tansy

Voices

Eternity, eternity;
Come get the blessings of tansy.

Tansy

I come in clusters,
To give you a golden yellow:
I am called tansy.
I possess apigenin and luteolin,
To give your cardigan eternity.

Voices

Eternity, eternity;
Come get the blessings of tansy.

Bloodroot

They've named me Bloodroot. The Chippewa used me with Wild Plum; rhizome of me, root of the plum. Our rendition in tandem: The Yellow Song we hum.

Saffron

As *Crocus Linnaeus*,
The one called Saffron,
I do not need a fixative.
No need of mordant:
A deep yellow I will give.

Alfalfa

I'm *Medicago sativa*,
The one called Alfalfa.
Take my seeds,
Put them in the dye bath
And boil me there in water.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Pomegranate

As Pomegranate,
Save my peel,
Soak it in hot water,
Then let it cool and strain.
Add your t-shirt,
And let it simmer,
There will be yellow,
Where once it was plain.

Eucalyptus

Pick me when its the hottest,
Boil me in a room where the air passes through.
Use my bark and leaves,
So your silk wrap will look like new.
I am Eucalyptus.

Dahlia

Come, take of me,
Collect some dahlia petals.
And in the dyeing bath,
Let copper be the mordant metal.

Yellow Onion

I can give you sunsets,
I can give you gold.
Commence the boiling of my skins,
To let the colour unfold:
For I am Yellow Onion.

I can give you yellow-orange,
The reds and russets of Earth.
Strain the skins and add the fabric,
Embellishing your hearth:
For I am Yellow Onion.

All Herbs

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To embellish your life with yellow.

Dyer's Chamomile

They have added chalk to the bath,
To make a stronger yellow:
I am Dyer's Chamomile.
Or Golden Marguerite:
There are many names in my file.
Such as Paris Daisy,
Boston Daisy,
Yellow Chamomile.
They have used us since ancient times,
Along the River Nile.

Sunflower

Voices

Vertical in your garden,
Horizontal in the bath.
An icon of summer,
When the picnickers laugh.

Sunflower

With the aid of iron,
I will give you yellow ochre,
I am the one called Sunflower.
Popular when erect,
Popular in the vat:
I am a yellow courier.

Voices

Vertical in your garden,
Horizontal in the bath.
An icon of summer,
When the picnickers laugh.

Calendula

I will give you lemon yellow,
For I am calendula.
Use iron, tin and alum,
For this favourite amongst the dyers.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Peach

Enjoy my fruit,
Don't discard the leaves,
For I'm *Prunus Persica*.
I am Peach,
Come to give yellow,
Transforming the unwanted jumper.

Safflower

I come from the colours of sunset, red, orange and yellow, come to give you the latter: I am called Safflower. First part of the process; the placing of my petals in a bath of cold water, for the duration of an hour.

Celery

As well as salad item,
And input into stews,
I'll present you with yellow,
For I am Celery.
So boil the water,
And place me in it.
It is time for colour,
For the yellow jamboree.

Heather

Although I am Heather,
"Don't judge a book by its cover."
Although I'm purple,
I'll give you yellow:
Re-casting of your pullover.

All Herbs

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To embellish your life with yellow.

Sumac

You'll need my inner pith,
If dyeing with me,
I am the one called Sumac.
What was bland,
Of limited attraction,
Will be firmly put on track.

Old Man's Beard

When you think of me,
You might think of grey,
But I facilitate yellow.
I am a lichen,
Called Old Man's Beard:
I will go with the dyer's flow.

Oregon Grape

From Asia and the Americas,
They call me *Mahonia*,
Aka Oregon Grape.
Boil my root in water,
To win the contest,
With your fancy dress hat and cape.

Osage Orange

Although I'm called orange,
I shall give you yellow,
From the mulberry family.
Take of my bark,
I'm Osage Orange,
Taking cloth from the dull to the pretty.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Oxalis

I am Oxalis,
So you'll need my flowers and stem.
Let's see what we can do,
With your trouser hem.
It could be tricky,
But we'll see what we can do,
No need for a mordant,
The dyer's glue.

Plume Poppy

Voices

Sap, sap,
He's got it on tap,
Get a donation of yellow.

Plume Poppy

Its the sap that you want from me,
Which is held within my stem.
I came from China and Japan,
To present a yellow gem.
I am known as Plume Poppy.

Voices

Sap, sap,
He's got it on tap,
Get a donation of yellow.

Bay Leaf

The brother wants to surprise his sis,
Using *Laurus nobilis*,
Leaves from the Laurel Tree.
I am Bay Leaf,
Here to help brother Keith,
A gift for an anniversary.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Chicory

Take me and roast me,
Add me to a bath of turmeric.
For I am known as chicory,
Boosting the yellowing fabric.

Rhubarb

Voices

Simmer and strain,
Use the leaves as a mordant,
Then leave it overnight.

Rhubarb

No need to be anxious,
No need to fret.
I am Rhubarb,
So chop my roots,
As they do in Nepal and Tibet.

Voices

Simmer and strain,
Use the leaves as a mordant,
Then leave it overnight.

Paprika

I come from sweet pepper,
To give you orange and yellow.
I have capsanthin,
As well as capsorubin.
My potential to beautify,
Is what the dyer knows:
I am *Paprika Oleoresin*.

Burdock

As well as for tea,
Use my root for colour.
I am Burdock,
Known as Gobo and Love Leaves,
Supporting your yellow endeavour.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Elderberry

Take my leaves
And add some copper,
For I am elderberry.
Although I'm dark purple,
I'll give you bright yellow,
So come now and do not tarry.

Fenugreek

Voices

Talk with the Egyptians,
And speak with the Indians too.

Fenugreek

I am a possessor of coumadine,
Held within my seed.
I am the one called Fenugreek,
Ancient one of the yellow creed.

Voices

Talk with the Egyptians,
And speak with the Indians too.

Horseradish

If you want a "deep yellow,"
Come and take of my leaves.
A colour specific,
A certain finish;
Look no further,
For I am Horseradish.

Fennel

Simmer, simmer,
To let me glimmer, glimmer,
Glowing with the glimmer of yellow.
I'm a giver of the glow called Fennel.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

Yellow Dock

I will be there with washing soda,
For I am Yellow Dock.
We will be there at the time of footwear;
Transformation from plain white,
To the request for yellow socks.

Willow

Sometimes, I don't weep because of the presence of sadness, but from the joy of giving. I was happy today to see the apprentice dyer, accepting my gift of leaves; returning to the workshop with Willow, to produce a portion of yellow.

Walnut

Although you may eat me,
Partake of me as milk.
Use my shells when you need to,
At the changing of the silk.

Red Glover

Put me with alum,
And I will give you gold.
I am Red Clover;
Stem, leaves and flowers,
To let the colour unfold.

Plantain

Take all of me,
Take me when I'm fresh,
Put me in the water with chrome.
I am known as Plantain,
Plantago major,
Honey yellow throughout your home.

All Herbs

We are the bringers of the glow,
To embellish your life with yellow.

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In 2009, Natty Mark Samuels founded African School, a cultural education project based in Oxford, teaching African Studies and Herbal Medicine. He is a holder of adult education certificates and a diploma in herbal medicine.

Early Black journalism is the main specialism in the African Studies provision and citrus advocacy in the herbal teaching. Teaching has taken place in a wide range of settings; community projects, museums, schools, colleges, universities and national organisations.

He also writes poetry, plays, is a magazine editor and a community journalist.



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