

From-the-Garden Garments

I MADE THE SWITCH to natural dyes five years ago and since then have immersed myself in the growing and research of garden plants for dyeing and printing. In an effort to design textile art with sustainable intent, I grow regional dye plants and use solar and decomposition extraction methods to allow the plants to release their color over time with assistance from the sun's heat. Prints, patterns, and color variegation are created from the low-tech methods of bundling, pressing, and hammering. The garment designs are informed by the surface design with an intent to minimize fabric waste; therefore, the use of the draped square and rectangle is prevalent. I do use electrically supplied heat for premordanting the fabrics with aluminum potassium sulfate or aluminum acetate as recommended by Michele Wipplinger, master dyer and founder of the fair-trade, natural-dye company Earthues.

The wearable-art pieces shown were created during a semester-long sabbatical leave from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, where I teach in the Apparel, Textiles, and Interior Design Department. Working as a professor leaves little time for creative scholarship, and I am grateful for the support from my institution. The leave provided focused time to explore and refine my color extraction techniques and bring the fabrics to wearable form. As my scholarship also encompasses research on natural dyes by testing pre- and post-treatments for colorfastness, my work is also partially supported by the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station.

Background visual texture for the *Halter* and *Verde Leaf* dress fabrics was created by bundling fresh and frozen flowers and leaves amongst wetted, premordanted fabric contained in either jars, pots, or bags.

The flower and leaf prints on the *Halter* and *Verde Leaf* dresses were created by hammering. I placed just-picked plants between premordanted, dry fabric layers. To absorb excess color and to protect the fabric, I surrounded the layers with paper or fabric. I hammered the plant through the layers using a hammer with

a soft rounded head.

Traditional fold-and-clamp shibori methods can be adapted to create repeating patterns by inserting flower petals into the folded fabric corners as seen in the *Tri-fold* bias slip dress fabric. After inserting petals, the fabric was wetted, placed in plastic to retain moisture, weighed down with a heavy object (a toolbox), and placed in a sunny location to dry.

The *Striation* gown fabric was created by placing flowers in sections between premordanted, wetted fabric layers. The fabric was twisted, secured with rubber bands to resist dye movement between sections, placed in plastic, and put in a sunny location to dry.

All fabrics were allowed to dry, the plant matter was removed, and the fabric was pressed to assist with heat setting. Fabrics were machine washed using a pH-neutral detergent. FA

LEFT, TOP: Hammered Halter (left) bias halter tunic and Verde Leaf (right) slip dress. The fabric background color and visual texture for both dresses is created from fresh plants bundled into silk crepe de chine and solar-dyed. The foreground imagery results from pounding or hammering plants onto the fabric surface. *LEFT, TOP CENTER:* Coreopsis plant material is sandwiched between mordanted pieces of fabric. An additional piece of fabric or watercolor paper is placed underneath and on top of the mordanted fabrics to protect it and absorb excess plant dye. *LEFT, BOTTOM CENTER:* Using a hammer with a rounded rubber head, the coreopsis plant is pounded into the fabrics. *LEFT, BOTTOM:* Detail of Hammered Halter bias halter tunic. All works are from the Organic Series, 2010; machine-sewn, hammer-printed, natural-dyed, resist-dyed. All photography was generously provided by Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. *OPPOSITE PAGE: TOP, LEFT:* Detail of Striation gown. *TOP, CENTER:* Flowers are grouped in sections on one-half of a piece of pleated, wetted and premordanted silk. Orange is cosmos, violet is black hollyhock and dark daylilies, yellow is cosmos, and blue is black pansy and lobelia. *TOP, RIGHT:* Fabric is twisted, wetted, and secured with rubber bands. The bundle is placed in a plastic bag and left in a sunny location for three days to dry.





BELOW, TOP LEFT: Detail of Tri-fold bias slip dress. BELOW, CENTER LEFT: Cotton/silk fabric is folded into four-inch deep pleats and pressed, then folded as a triangle along the pleated length and pressed. Flower petals are inserted into each corner of the triangles. The stacked triangle is wetted, placed in a plastic bag, weighted down under a board, and placed in a sunny location. After three days the stack is air-dried, then opened. BELOW, BOTTOM LEFT: Tick-seed, hollyhock and cosmos flowers were used for the resist techniques. BELOW, RIGHT: Striation bias, asymmetric gown (left) and Tri-fold bias slip dress (right). Physical resist techniques are used to control the plant placement and resulting color and pattern.

