SINGING THE BLUES: Working with *Persicaria tinctoria*

With John Marshall©

Dried-Leaf Reduction Vat

Supplies:

- blender
- stainless steel pot
- dried indigo leaves 100g
- soda ash 15g + 15g + 15g
- thiox (or RIT Color Remover) 12g + 12g + 12g
- dish detergent (optional)
- Japanese rice vinegar 40ml

CAUTION: ***Do this outside or with good ventilation–thiox vapors can cause health problems.***

Directions:

① Add 100g of dried leaves to 5l of water and simmer for twenty minutes. The hot water will help to remove some of the impurities.

② Strain off all of the liquid and dispose of it.

③ Return the cooked leaves to the pot with 5l of water.

④ Add 15g of soda ash and 12g of thiox, simmer for twenty minutes. A dark blue film should form across the surface.

⑤ Strain the broth into a separate container.

⑥ Repeat ③-⑤ for a total of three times, combining each batch into the same container to collect a total of 15-16l of dye liquid. The strained liquid will be your dye bath. *You may find that it isn't necessary to use a full 15g soda ash and 12g thiox for the second and third batches since the leaves will have retained some of the chemicals from the first batch.*

⑦ To help prevent streaking during the dye process, add 10ml of dish detergent to the dye bath. These are surfactants and will help the dye get past any trapped bubbles in the weave.

⑧ The dye bath should be kept between room temperature and around 50° C.

⑨ Soak your fiber for five minutes in hot water. Gently squeeze to remove the excess water.
⑩ Introduce fiber.
⑪ After five minutes pull from the dye bath, lightly wring and hang up to oxidize. The fiber should appear yellowish at first and gradually turn blue before your eyes.
⑫ To achieve darker colors, repeat ⑩-⑪. The more times you dip the fabric into the dye bath the darker the color you will eventually achieve.
⑬ The dye bath is very alkaline. To neutralize the effects on the fabric, soak the cotton briefly in a 2-3% acetic solution. (Add 40㎖ of Japanese rice vinegar to 1l of water.)
⑭ Rinse with clean water and hang in a shady spot to dry.