

FROM WOODS & FIELDS



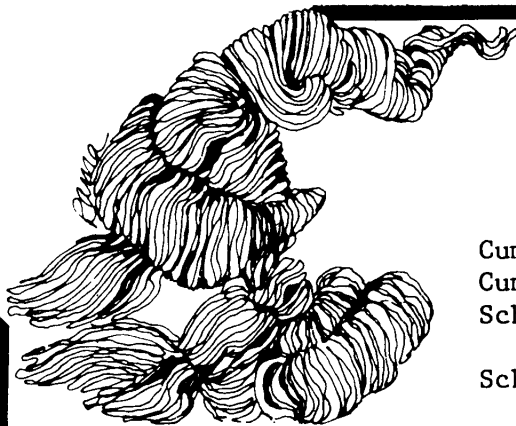
by Connie Magoffin

Snowflakes falling gently. Jack Frost at the Window. Purple Indian corn. Purple Indian corn? Amidst the winter white it seemed a bit out of context when an envelope arrived filled with purple Indian corn kernels, a purple husk and the yarn samples dyed in purples, lavenders, blues and blue-green. Marge Manthei has, again, shared some dye experiments with us and they are both exciting and frustrating. Frustrating because I must wait until this fall to try dying with purple Indian corn. The colors are incredible! The experiments that Marge sent included unmordanted yarns and yarns mordanted with the standard five. These produced a range of colors: medium light red-violet (no mordant), medium light blue-violet (alum), deep blue-green (chrome), black (tin), dull medium light violet (copper) and navy blue (iron). The yarns were altered with vinegar and the results were to redden the unmordanted, alum and copper wools to make a rather rich range of red-violets. Tin continued to be black and the iron deepened to a blue-black. In a third experiment, the yarns were altered with tin. In all cases the value was lightened considerably and a variety of

lavenders resulted; the exception was with tin where the black lightened to a dark charcoal color.

Although Marge sent samples of the purple corn kernels and noted that the cobs were also purple, the purple husks appear to be the part she used for dyeing. Boiling water was poured over the husks and they were then steeped to obtain the color. She referred to Ida Grae's marvelous book, *Nature's Colors* (p.177). In the Grae book the dyestuff used was the shelled corn (1 lb. or approximately 3 purple cobs) for 2 oz. of alum-mordanted wool. The corn and water is brought to a boil and simmered for one hour or until the corn begins to crack. The kernels are strained out and the dyebath is allowed to cool. The wool is entered and simmered for 40 minutes, left in the dyebath overnight to cool, rinsed and dried. According to Ida Grae a fast color is difficult to achieve except by the above method. She also comments that to be used for dyeing both corn and cob must be purple. This information corresponds with the kind of Indian corn that Marge also used.

Grae includes some interesting history about the use of Indian corn (*Zea mays*) as a dye. It is a member of the grass family and was not used for food as it stains the mouth. The Hopi name is *koko'ma* and the Hopi Indians dyed their basketry materials, wool and cotton with purple Indian corn. A body paint was made for Kachina dances from a mixture of white clay and the liquor from a combination of boiled purple corn and sumac berries.



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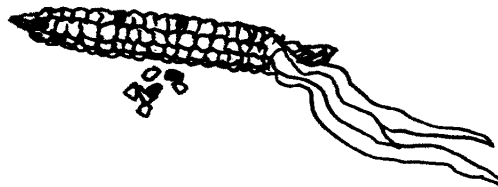
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I found only two other references to the use of purple Indian corn as a dyestuff. Krochmal (*The Complete Illustrated Book of Dyes from Natural Sources*, p. 27) states that sunflower seeds and purple Indian corn seed were used by the Indians to obtain purple on baskets and, less often, on clothing. In the *Brooklyn Botanic Garden Handbook #46* (p. 81) I found a reference to the use of 'blood red' corn as a dyestuff. In Elwin L. Page's book, *GEORGE Washington in New Hampshire* (Houghton Mifflin, 1932), according to Washington's diary, in November, 1789 in Portsmouth, he was visited by a clergyman who showed him an ear of corn, part of the red corn stalk and the cloth which had been dyed with the corn. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden tests with red corn husks on wool resulted only in a dark gray.

I have heard for several years about blues and purples obtained from purple Indian corn; I had never tried it, however, partially due to the necessity of purchasing it and, more importantly, because I had read no convincing evidence of the proposed results. Marge's samples certainly changed all that and you can be sure that we will have a row of purple Indian corn in this year's dye garden nursery area. I wanted to pass on this information to you now as seed ordering time is upon us. My light tests will be done by next month and there will also be more experiments shared by fellow dyers in my next column.



FROM THE WEAVER'S JOURNAL

A recent survey by *The Weaver's Journal* indicated that many of their readers weave interesting projects which they are willing to share.

If you have such a project, take pictures of it (preferably in black and white). Send the photos with the draft, type of yarn used, the source of your design (original or where you got the idea), any weaving instructions you may have and your permission for them to publish the project.

They will send \$5.00 to each weaver whose project is published in *The Weaver's Journal* and the project will be identified in the magazine with the weaver's name and guild. Projects they cannot use will be returned with their thanks.

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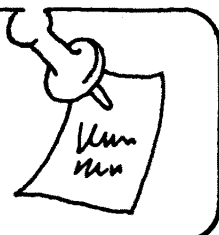
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TO ENTER:

The Edina Art Fair will take place June 6-8, 1980. Deadline for entrants is April 15, 1980. Application forms may be obtained by writing to Edina Art Fair, P.O.Box 24122, Edina Station, MN 55424.

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