

■ ■ ■ Staining Wood with Tea & Vinegar

Adapted from "*The Natural Paint Book*," by Lynn Edwards and Julia Lawless.

Plant dyes have a translucent quality because light can pass through the molecules of color (whereas it is reflected off the grains of a natural pigment). Tannins are naturally present in woods like oak, but pale woods like pine can be darkened by having tannins added to them in the form of strong black tea.

Here is an interesting trick to help the tannins react with the wood to produce a rich, dark color:

Iron acetate, when applied to the wood, reacts with tannins.

This recipe is open to a lot of experimentation. The results can be unpredictable, so conduct some trials first before applying either of the two stains to your woodwork.

Ingredients

To add tannins:

2 1/4 cups water

1/3 cup Indian tea leaves

For iron acetate:

Large ball of fine steel wool

Malt Vinegar

Method

For the tannin mixture, boil the water and add it to the tea leaves. Let the tea steep for an hour or two, then strain it into a bowl.

For the iron acetate mixture, place the steel wool in a jar and cover it with the malt vinegar. Screw the lid on and leave it overnight. The next day, strain the mixture through a colander or strainer lined with muslin or cheesecloth to remove all the steel wool. (For a more powerful iron acetate solution, use more steel wool, or let it soak longer.)

Application

Apply the tannin mixture to the wood with a medium paintbrush or lint-free cloth. Leave it for a few minutes before wiping off any excess with a lint-free cloth. Some pale woods will be colored by this process alone. Let it dry.

Now apply the iron acetate solution to the wood with a medium paintbrush or lint-free cloth. The wood should start to darken immediately and can continue to darken for up to half an hour.

Let the wood dry thoroughly before sanding it lightly. You can then apply an oil or wax finish.

Wash brushes and tools in warm, soapy water