

Weaving and Dyeing

Objectives

- To learn how the Nuns spun, wove and dyed their own cloth to make their simple habits.
- To know which plants provided natural dyes and their colours.
- To understand the stages of cloth making.
- To understand the principles of weaving using warp and weft threads.

Activities

- To examine the clothes worn by a Nun.
- To look at different types of cloth- wool and linen, in order for children to recognise warp and weft threads. Children will observe a large loom with partially woven cloth on it.
- To use a small card loom to weave a warp and weft.
- Children will choose a vegetable dye to dye their own sample of cloth.

Background Information

Cloth was made in medieval times mainly with wool which was carded or combed before being spun into yarn. Yarn was woven into cloth on a loom. The cloth was 'fulled' to cleanse and thicken it by pounding underfoot. The cloth then had to be stretched on a frame with 'tenterhooks'.

The Nuns' habits were probably in plain colours, and later black in the Benedictine Order, and cloth at the time was dyed using available plants.

Common dye plants included:

Madder root for red

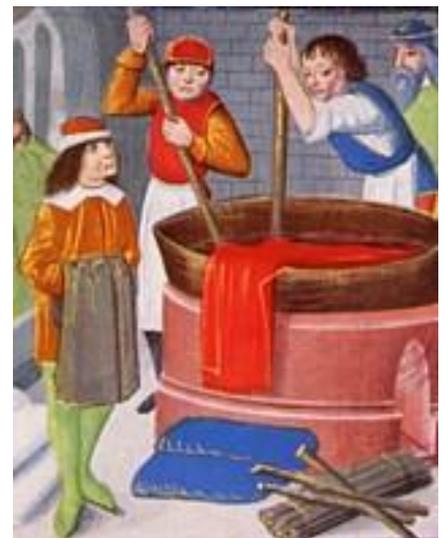
Woad for blue

Weld, onion skin or marigold for yellow

Walnut shells or bark for brown

Lichen for violet.

Alum was used as a mordant to fix the colour in the cloth.



The nuns would have had detailed knowledge of dyeing and the techniques used. Black and green are the most difficult dyes to make.