

# A Simple Guide to Making Your Own Ink's

*By Kristin Snopek  
MoonWoven Sanctuary*



## A Note From the Author...

Lets step into the world of ink alchemy, one swirl and stain at a time. I'm thrilled you found your way here.

I want to let you in on a little secret: this guide didn't start in a fancy studio or an art school. It started in a backyard, with purple-stained fingers and a handful of pokeberries I'd squished onto paper because I thought they were magic. I was just a kid having fun and making a mess, not knowing I was walking the same path as scribes and artists who came centuries before me. That feeling, the magic of discovering color and story right outside your door, has stayed with me all this time. It's the pulse behind every page you're about to read.

Over the years, I've learned the chemistry behind the magic, the history behind the recipes, and the techniques that make an ink truly sing. But at its core, ink-making remains what it was on that first day for me: a conversation with nature. Sometimes the color surprises you. Sometimes it fades. Sometimes it's exactly what you dreamed.

This little guide is my way of handing you the lantern and saying, "Come on in. You've got this." It's the guide I wish I'd had when I was starting out, when I wanted clear steps, simple explanations, and just enough "why" to make everything click without feeling overwhelmed.

Inside, you'll find the basics, the hows and the whys that matter most, plus a handful of practical tools to help you start creating right away. Think printable worksheets and recipe pages you can use, scribble on, and come back to whenever you need a refresher. It's beginner-friendly, curious, and meant to feel like play, not pressure.

And if you fall in love with the process and want to go deeper later, a more in-depth guide is coming down the road. For now, this is your starting place. A gentle doorway. A spark. A small, steady invitation to experiment, learn, and let your hands discover what they can do.

So, grab your pot, your foraged treasures, or your kitchen spices. Let's make some glorious, unpredictable, beautiful messes together. Let's leave our mark with the very colors of the earth.

Kristin

*"The earth remembers in color.  
We need only learn to listen with our hearts.*

*MoonWoven Wisdom*



# *A Guide to Making Your Own Ink's*

## **Purpose**

This guide invites you on a journey of creativity and connection, transforming everyday & foraging finds into vibrant, historical, and deeply personal inks. You'll find everything you need to become a modern-day ink alchemist, from the essential tools and safety principles to detailed, step-by-step recipes.

## **What This Guide Offers:**

- **Foundational Knowledge:** A clear breakdown of the core components of ink, pigments, and binders, and how to harness them.
- **Practical Setup:** A straightforward list of tools and ingredients, emphasizing household items and safe practices.
- **The Master Process:** A simple, universal method for creating ink from almost any natural material, from berries to bark.
- **Tried-and-True Recipes:** Specific formulas for crafting classic inks, including deep Black Walnut Ink, vibrant Berry Ink, permanent Iron Gall Ink, and warm Turmeric & Onion Skin Ink.
- **Inspiring Application:** Tips on how to use your unique inks with dip pens, brushes, and other tools, encouraging experimentation and artistic expression.

Perfect for artists, writers, hobbyists, homesteaders, and homeschoolers, this guide demystifies the process of creating eco-friendly, non-toxic, and sustainable art supplies. It's more than a set of instructions. It's an invitation to slow down, observe the colors in your environment, and leave your mark with the very essence of nature.

**Create. Experiment. Connect. Make your mark, naturally.**

## Introduction & The Basic Principles

### Why Make Your Own Ink?

- **Connection to Nature:** It transforms a walk in the woods or your backyard into a foraging adventure.
- **Sustainability:** It's a non-toxic, eco-friendly alternative to many synthetic art supplies.
- **Uniqueness:** Each batch is one-of-a-kind, with colors influenced by the soil, season, and specific ingredients.
- **Historical Practice:** You are participating in an ancient art form used for millennia.

### How Ink Works: Pigment + Binder

All ink is essentially two components:

1. **Pigment:** The finely ground material that provides the color.
2. **Binder:** A liquid that suspends the pigment, helps it adhere to paper, and controls its flow.

In natural ink making, you will extract pigment (through boiling or soaking) and then add a binder to create the final ink.

### Essential Tools & Safety

You don't need a fancy lab; most items are likely in your kitchen already.

#### Equipment:

- **Dedicated Pots & Utensils:** Use old pots, spoons, and bowls you don't mind staining. Never use them for food again.
- **Heat Source:** A stove or hot plate.
- **Strainers:** Fine mesh sieves, cheesecloth, or old stockings.
- **Glass Jars:** Small mason jars or recycled glass containers with lids for storing ink.
- **Measuring Cups & Spoons**
- **Mortar and Pestle:** For grinding hard materials.

#### Safety First:

- NEVER use aluminum pots as they can react with ingredients.
- Label everything clearly.
- Work in a well-ventilated area.
- Wear gloves and an apron to avoid staining your hands and clothes.
- Supervise pots on the stove at all times.

## Key Ingredients:

- **Binder:** Gum Arabic. This is sap from the acacia tree, purchased as crystals or powder. It acts as the binder for most inks.
- **Mordant:** A fixative that helps the ink bond to the paper and can sometimes alter the color. Common, safe mordants include:
  - **Vinegar (Acidic):** Brightens some colors.
  - **Salt (Alkaline):** Can dull or change colors.
  - **Ferrous Sulfate (Iron):** The most powerful mordant. It creates deep blacks, grays, and can dramatically shift colors (e.g., turning tannins from brown to black). Handle iron with care; wear gloves and a mask if using powder.

## Binders, Mordants & Advanced Techniques

### Natural Binders (To Thicken & Adhere):

1. **Gum Arabic (Best All-Around):** Whisk powder directly into warm ink, or make a solution (1 tbsp powder to 1 cup water) and add by the teaspoon.
2. **Gelatin:** Heat 1 cup of water with 2 tsp gelatin until dissolved. Add to the ink gradually.
3. **Raw Honey:** Use sparingly; adds body but can be sticky.

### Mordants (To Fix & Change Color):

- **Vinegar (Acidic):** Brightens reds/pinks. Mild preservative.
- **Salt (Alkaline):** Can dull or "sadden" greens and blues.
- **Iron (Ferrous Sulfate):** The most powerful. Creates blacks, grays, and deepens tannins. **Always wear gloves when handling powder.**

### Pro Tips for Experimentation:

- **Keep a Journal:** Document your recipes! Note what you used, how long you cooked it, and the binder/mordant ratios. Include a swatch of the final color.
- **Forage Responsibly:** Only take what you need and never strip a plant altogether.
- **Test Different Mordants:** Try the same pigment with vinegar, salt, and iron to see the full spectrum of colors you can create.
- **Layer & Mix:** Use your inks as watercolor-like washes, or mix them in a palette to create new colors.
- **Play with pH:** Use distilled water as a neutral base. Test how vinegar or baking soda changes your ink color (especially with red cabbage or berry inks).
- **Test Tools:** Try your inks with dip pens, brushes, feathers, or even sticks.

Creating natural ink is a blend of science, art, and alchemy. Embrace the unexpected results, enjoy the process, and leave your mark with the colors of the earth.

## The Universal Ink-Making Method

This is the standard process for creating most plant-based inks. While ingredients and tools have evolved, the fundamental process for making plant-based ink is ancient and universal. For millennia, from Egyptian scribes to medieval monks, ink-makers have followed this same alchemy: extracting color through heat and patience, then binding it for the page. The steps below are a direct link to that enduring craft—a simple, time-tested ritual that transforms foraged treasures into a medium for marks that can, quite literally, last forever.

1. **Prepare Your Material:** Chop, crush, or grind your natural material to increase its surface area. This helps release more pigment.
2. **Extract the Color:** Place your material in a pot and cover it with twice as much water. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.
3. **Simmer and Reduce:** Let it simmer for at least 1 hour, often longer. The goal is to cook the liquid down to a concentrated, richly colored "tea." You can let it sit overnight for even more color extraction.
4. **Strain:** Once cooled, pour the liquid through a fine strainer or cheesecloth into a bowl or jar. Squeeze out every last drop of pigment! Discard the solid plant matter.
5. **Add Binder:** For every 1/2 cup of liquid, add 1-2 teaspoons of gum arabic powder. Stir vigorously until completely dissolved. This gives the ink body and helps it stick to the page.
6. **Add Mordant (Optional):** If using, add a pinch of your mordant (like iron) now. Be aware that this will permanently change the color.
7. **Test and Adjust:** Use a dip pen or brush to test your ink on a scrap of paper. If it's too pale, simmer it further to reduce. If it's too thick, add a few drops of water.
8. **Store:** Pour your finished ink into a clean jar, label it with the contents and date, and store it in the fridge. Most homemade inks will last several weeks to a few months.

## Quick-Start Formula (Simple "Infusion" Method)

For a very simple, no-cook (or low-heat) ink to test an ingredient, use this template with any item from the Encyclopedia:

1. **Crush/Grind** your material.
2. **Place** in a jar and cover with **very hot water**.
3. **Let steep** for 12-24 hours (or simmer gently for 1 hour).
4. **Strain**.
5. **Add a few drops of vinegar** and a **pinch of Gum Arabic powder**. Stir.
6. **Test and adjust**.

This method is perfect for **berry ink, tea ink, coffee ink, turmeric ink, hibiscus ink, lavender ink, and wine ink**.

## Long-Lasting Ink Recipe (With Preservatives)

An excellent base for any plant-based ink:

1. **Combine** ½ cup plant material with 1 cup water, 1 tsp white vinegar, and a dash of salt in a pot.
2. **Simmer** gently (do not boil) for at least 1 hour until deeply colored.
3. **Cool** and strain thoroughly.
4. **Preserve** - For every 10 parts of ink, add 1 part Gum Arabic solution and 10 drops of thyme or wintergreen essential oil. Mix well.

## The Master Recipes: Detailed & Tested Formulas

Here are some classic recipes to get you started.

### 1. Classic Black Walnut Ink

**Source:** Black walnut hulls (the green outer fruit). Wear gloves! The stains are powerful.

**Color:** A rich, warm, deep brown-black.

1. Recipe:

- Collect 10-12 black walnut hulls (often found on the ground in autumn).
- Break them up with a hammer and place them in a pot. Cover with water.
- Simmer for 4-6 hours, adding water as needed, until the liquid is very dark.
- Strain out the hulls.
- For every cup of liquid, add 1 tsp of gum arabic and 1/2 tsp of iron mordant (ferrous sulfate). The iron will react with the tannins in the walnut, turning the brown liquid a glorious, permanent black.
- Bottle and store.

### 2. Vibrant Berry Ink

**Source:** Any dark berries: blackberries, blueberries, elderberries, raspberries.

**Color:** Purples, pinks, and reds. These inks are often more fugitive (will fade over time).

**Recipe:**

- Mash 1 cup of berries with a fork or mortar and pestle.
- Add 1/2 cup of water and simmer for 15-20 minutes.
- Strain thoroughly through cheesecloth to remove all seeds and pulp.
- Add 1/2 tsp of gum arabic and a few drops of vinegar (as a mordant and preservative) to the strained liquid. Stir until combined.
- Note: Berry ink is beautiful but can mold more easily. Use it quickly.

### **3. Rusty Nail Iron Gall Ink (Historical)**

Source: Tannins (from oak galls or strong tea) and iron.

Color: Pale gray when first applied, but oxidizes to a permanent, deep blue-black.

Recipe:

- Part A: Create a tannin solution by crushing 2-3 oak galls (or using 4 tbsp of strong black tea) and simmering in 1 cup of water for 30 minutes. Strain.
- Part B: Soak a handful of rusty iron nails (or steel wool) in 1/4 cup of vinegar for a week, until the liquid is orange.
- Combine the strained tannin solution (Part A) with a few teaspoons of the iron liquid (Part B). The color will change instantly.
- Add a tiny amount of gum arabic (1/2 tsp) to bind. This ink is extremely permanent and was used for important documents.

### **4. Warm Turmeric & Onion Skin Ink**

**Source:** Yellow onion skins and turmeric spice.

Color: Brilliant golds and oranges.

**Recipe:**

- Collect the dry skins from 5-6 yellow onions.
- Place them in a pot with 2 cups of water and 1 tablespoon of turmeric powder.
- Simmer for 45 minutes until the liquid is a deep, golden-orange.
- Strain out the skins.
- Add 1 tsp of gum arabic and a pinch of salt (as a mordant) to the liquid. Stir to dissolve.

### **Using and Experimenting with Your Inks**

#### **How to Use Your Inks:**

- Dip Pens & Quills: The classic tool. You will need a nib holder and various nibs. Test your ink's flow; you may need to adjust the gum arabic content if it's too thick or thin.
- Brushes: Perfect for painting, calligraphy, or washes.
- **\*\* homemade Pens:\*\*** Try using a stick, feather, or even a folded piece of cardboard as a rudimentary pen.

## The Ink-Maker's Encyclopedia: Ingredients A-Z

This is your master list. Use any item here with the **Universal Method** or the **Enhanced Plant Ink** recipe above. Experiment with an array of materials from your garden or pantry. You can use any of the ingredients below to create your own homemade ink using these recipes. Still, black walnut hull powder, ground coffee beans, and beetroot powder are particularly effective.

Ingredient	Expected Color	Special Notes / Tips
<b>Acorn hulls</b>	Light brown	Rich in tannins.
<b>Avocado pits</b>	Soft pink	Simmer for a surprisingly delicate hue.
<b>Beetroot (fresh or powder)</b>	Magenta pink	Vibrant but fugitive.
<b>Berries (mixed)</b>	Reds, purples, pinks	Frozen then thawed berries release the most pigment.
<b>Black Walnut Hulls</b>	Deep brown to black	The classic. Powerful stain.
<b>Charcoal / Soot</b>	Matte black	Finely grind. Needs a good binder (Gum Arabic).
<b>Charred Wood</b>	Black	Use from a safe, controlled source.
<b>Coffee (grounds)</b>	Rich brown	Used grounds work perfectly.
<b>Elderberries</b>	Deep purple	Strong colorant.
<b>Hibiscus Flowers</b>	Bright pink	Creates a beautifully vibrant ink.
<b>Indigo Powder</b>	Rich blue	Does not require heat; mix with warm water and binder.
<b>Lavender Flowers</b>	Pale grey-lilac	Delicate color and scent.

Ingredient	Expected Color	Special Notes / Tips
<b>Lavender Flowers</b>	Pale grey-lilac	Delicate color and scent.
<b>Madder Root</b>	Vibrant red	A historic and strong red dye.
<b>Pomegranate (juice or rind)</b>	Reddish-brown	High in tannins, like a light iron gall ink base.
<b>Red Cabbage</b>	Blue or Purple	<b>pH-sensitive:</b> Add vinegar for pink, baking soda for blue.
<b>Red Onion Skins</b>	Green to Orange	A fantastic foraged ingredient.
<b>Saffron Threads</b>	Golden-yellow	Luxurious and lightfast.
<b>Spinach</b>	Yellow-Green	Simmer briefly to retain color.
<b>Tea (Black, Green, Rooibos)</b>	Various browns	Strong tea is a great, simple tannin source.
<b>Turmeric Powder</b>	Bright yellow	Vibrant but can fade; salt mordant helps.
<b>Yellow Onion Skins</b>	Warm orange	Abundant and reliable.
<b>Wine (Red)</b>	Burgundy	Can be used straight or reduced.

**Final Note:** Natural ink-making is a dialogue with nature. Your results will vary—and that's the point. This guide gives you the framework and the extensive palette. Now, go explore, make a glorious mess, and discover your own signature colors.

# Workbook Pages

## A Note Before You Begin

Natural ink does not always behave in straight lines. Some colors bloom. Some fade. Some deepen into something richer than you expected. Let these pages hold the record of your experiments, your surprises, your muddy failures, and your beautiful successes. This is not about perfection. It is about learning the language of color with your own hands.



# INK RECIPE

RECIPE NAME \_\_\_\_\_

RECIPE NOTE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE MADE \_\_\_\_\_

INK TYPE \_\_\_\_\_

SOURCE & MATERIAL

INGREDIENT SOURCE

CONDITION

Fresh

Dried

Powdered

Frozen

Foraged

PLANT MATERIAL USED \_\_\_\_\_

PROCESS \_\_\_\_\_

WATER AMOUNT \_\_\_\_\_

SIMMER / STEEP TIME \_\_\_\_\_

BINDER USED

AMOUNT

MORDANT USED

AMOUNT

PRESERVATIVE USED

AMOUNT

FINISHING&STORAGE \_\_\_\_\_

STRAINED THROUGH \_\_\_\_\_

FINAL YIELD \_\_\_\_\_

STORAGE JAR / BOTTLE \_\_\_\_\_

STORED WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

BEST BY / CHECK AGAIN \_\_\_\_\_

RESULTS \_\_\_\_\_

WET COLOR

DRY COLOR

OPACITY



FLOW



STAINING POWER



SCENT \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT I WOULD CHANGE NEXT TIEM

# Ink Recipe Record

*Record the making so the color can be found again.*

Recipe Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Made: \_\_\_\_\_ Batch# \_\_\_\_\_

Source of Ingredient(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Fresh / Dried / Powdered / Frozen / Foraged: \_\_\_\_\_

Ingredient(s):

- main color material \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_
- water \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_
- binder \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_
- mordant \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_
- preservative \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_
- optional modifier or additive \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_

Simmer / Steep Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Strained Through: \_\_\_\_\_

Final Yield: \_\_\_\_\_

Stored In: \_\_\_\_\_

Storage Location: \_\_\_\_\_

## Results

Wet Color: \_\_\_\_\_

Dry Color: \_\_\_\_\_

Flow: \_\_\_\_\_

Opacity: \_\_\_\_\_

Scent: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Next Time I Want to Remember:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ink Test Box

\_\_\_\_\_

# INK SWATCH & WRITING TEST

INK NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INK SOURCE \_\_\_\_\_

## COLOR SWATCHES

WET SWATCH

DRY SWATCH



## WRITING TESTS

BRUSH TEST

DIP PEN TEST



HOMEMADE PEN / STICK / FEATHER TEST



WATER DILUTION TEST

LAYERING TEST



## PAPER USED

FMLIONWI RATINGS

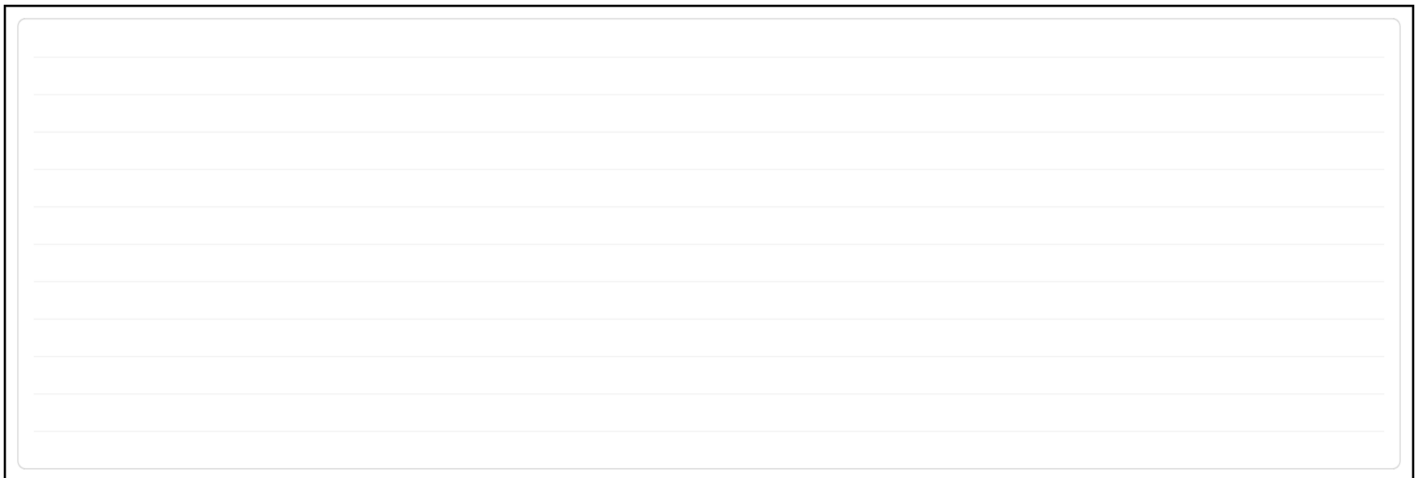
COVERAGE

READABILITY

SMUDGE RESISTANCE



## NOTES



# Ink Experiment Tracker

For the curious hands that want to wander a little. Use this page to record each ink variation you test. Even small changes can shift the final color, texture, and performance. This tracker helps you notice patterns, remember what worked, and decide which recipes are worth keeping.

Experiment Date	Base Ingredient	Variation Tested	Binder Change	Mordant Change	PH Adjustment	Simmer or Steep Difference	Resulting Color	Performance Notes	Keep, Tweak, or Discard

INK NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Batch # \_\_\_\_\_

# Mordant Comparison Sheet

*One ingredient tested four ways:*

- No mordant
- Vinegar
- Salt
- Iron

Base Ingredient: \_\_\_\_\_ Batch Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Variation	Swatch	Notes on Color Shift	Notes on Flow	Notes on Permanence
No Mordant				
Vinegar				
Salt				
Iron				

Favorite Result: \_\_\_\_\_

## Additional Notes On Favorite Results

Notes on Color Shift:
-----------------------

Notes on Flow:
----------------

Notes on Permanence:
----------------------

## pH Color Shift Test

Use small, measured changes when adjusting pH, and test on the same paper whenever possible so the color shifts are easier to compare.

Ingredient Tested	Neutral Batch	Added Vinegar	Added Baking Soda	Resulting Colors	Best Use for Each Shade	Notes

### Quick Tips for pH Testing

- Start with very small amounts of vinegar or baking soda. A little can shift the color more than you expect.
- Test each variation on the same kind of paper for a more accurate comparison.
- Let swatches dry fully before judging the final shade.
- Record both wet and dry appearance if the color changes a lot.
- Some inks will keep shifting as they sit, so check them again later if needed.

### pH Notes at a Glance

- Vinegar often pushes color toward pink, red, or brighter warm tones.
- Baking soda may shift color toward blue, green, gray, or muted purple.
- Not every plant reacts strongly.
- Color can change again as the ink dries.

### What to Watch For

As you test pH shifts, notice whether the color becomes brighter, darker, duller, cooler, warmer, or more muted. Some ingredients will change dramatically, while others only whisper a small difference. Pay attention not only to beauty, but also to how the ink behaves on the page.