



GROWING COLOR

Natural Dyes from Plants

About Growing Color

There is a growing demand for natural color for use in the textile, cosmetic, and food industries, but local sources for many of these dyes are scant. Growing Color is designed for professionals in the farming, herb, and textile industries and for anyone interested in the fascinating history and potential of plant-based color. The conference aims to focus awareness about issues and opportunities in plant dyes and encourage a sustainable natural dye industry in Western North Carolina. The 2020 symposium will expand its emphasis to include growing naturally colored fibers with Sally Fox's presentation on her research and development in naturally colored cotton.

Featured Speakers

Sarah Bellos | Catharine Ellis | Sally Fox | Rowland Ricketts | Dede Styles | Melanie Wilder

Support for the Growing Color Symposium is provided in part by North Carolina Biotechnology Center, Hilton Asheville Biltmore Park, The Laurel of Asheville and Sow True Seed.

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Pre-Symposium Workshop

"What Really Happens in the Indigo Vat?"

Rowland Ricketts and Catharine Ellis

10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Evening Talk and Reception

"Seed, Plant, Resist"

A Talk by Rowland Ricketts

6:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Growing Color Symposium

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.



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Thursday, March 12, 2020
Presented by the North Carolina Arboretum

8:30 – 9:00 a.m. Registration and Coffee, Educational and Sales Vending Area Open

Session 1

9:00 – 9:30 a.m. **Clara Curtis**, Welcome and Introductions
Rebecca Caldwell, Announcements

Session 1

9:30 – 10:45 a.m. **Sarah Bellos**, *A New Whole Systems Approach to Bringing Natural Indigo to Scale*

10:45 – 11:00 a.m. Break, Educational and Sales Vending Area Open

Session 2

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. **Catharine Ellis**, *Defining Mordants and Their Role in Dyeing*
12:15 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. **Dede Styles**, *Wild Mountain Times*

12:30 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. Lunch

Session 3

1:15 – 2:00 p.m. **Sally Fox**, *Sustainable Textiles: Creating a Place for Naturally-Colored Cottons*

2:00 – 2:30 p.m. Book Signing, Break and Dessert, Educational and Sales Vending Area Open

Session 4

2:30 – 3:45 p.m. Panel Discussion: *Indigo: A Sense of Place*
Melanie Wilder, Moderator, with **Rowland Ricketts** and **Sarah Bellos**

3:45 – 4:00 p.m. Closing



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2020 SPEAKERS

Sarah Bellos, CEO and Founder of Stony Creek Colors, has been working with indigo and natural dyes since 2006, having previously managed a textile dye house offering garment and piece dyeing with plant based color. A graduate of the Cornell University Agriculture School with a degree in Natural Resources Management, she has managed small farms and worked across the food and agriculture sector. Bellos developed Stony Creek Colors to build a new future for natural color harnessing advancements in sustainable agriculture, crop development, and chemical and process engineering. She has been a recognized leader in research efforts to bring bio-based colorant production to farmers in the Southeastern U.S. In 2015, Bellos was awarded the Young Entrepreneur Award by the AATCC, American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists, the world's leading not-for-profit association serving textile professionals. Stony Creek was a Martha Stewart American Made Awardee in 2016 and the Tennessee feature for Fast Company Magazine's United States of Innovation in 2017. Sarah Bellos was named an Inc Magazine Top 100 Female Founder in 2018.

Catharine Ellis has been making textiles for over 40 years. Her work most often combines both weaving and dyeing. For the last 12 years her focus has been primarily on natural dyeing. She continues to research and develop new applications for the use of natural colorants in her own textiles and for her teaching. Ellis is the author of *Woven Shibori* (Interweave Press, 2005, 2015) and *The Art and Science of Natural Dyes* (Schiffer Press, 2019) with co-author Joy Boutrup. Her work has been exhibited in venues worldwide and she teaches internationally. Ellis's current "Garden Series" utilizes plant dyes harvested from her garden.

Sally Fox has developed numerous cotton varieties and seed lines that continue to expand the possibilities of what naturally colored cottons can bring to our textile story. She began her life as an inventor in 1982 in Davis, California, as a handspinner for a cotton breeder. Although cottons are usually bleached white then dyed to suit the needs of the clothing manufacturer, Fox fell in love with their natural brown color. Noticing that the fiber was significantly shorter, weaker and thinner than that of commercial white varieties, and therefore more difficult to spin, Fox went to work on selecting the best possible quality brown cottons, hand-ginning each seed and hand-spinning the fiber. Year after year, she planted the best of the yield and designed and spun a series of unique yarns that could be made only with her naturally colored cottons. Two of the numerous advantages of naturally colored cottons are that they eliminate the need for the dyeing and finishing steps that are detrimental to the environment, and they are innately more fire-resistant than white cotton.

Fox has received a patent and three Plant Variety Protection Certificates for her naturally colored cottons, which, in addition to browns, she now grows in reds and greens. Her invention has been so popular that it has sprouted multiple successful companies, including Vreseis, Ltd. and FoxFibre. Fox has tended seven farms, bringing each of them into certified organic production. Settling at last into California's Capay Valley in the late 1990s, she determined to reach for biodynamic status, adding animals and intercropping as critical parts of the equation. She took on Olkowski's fine-colored, woolled merino sheep and then introduced Sonora heirloom wheat on her land, sequestering "a whole heck of a lot of carbon" with the copious root systems of the wheat, harvesting the flavorful grains and allowing sheep to graze on the stubble. Fox intercrops her organic cotton breeding plots with black-eyed peas, milo and other plants.

Rowland Ricketts utilizes natural dyes and historical processes to create contemporary textiles that span art and design. Trained in indigo farming and dyeing in Japan, Rowland received his master of fine arts degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2005 and is currently an Associate Professor in the School of Art, Architecture & Design at Indiana University. His work has been exhibited at The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and the Seattle Asian Art Museum and has been recognized with a 2012 United States Artists Fellowship.

Ricketts grows and processes his own indigo (*Polygonum tinctorium*) using Japanese methods that are centuries old. The leaves are harvested, dried and composted by hand to make the traditional Japanese indigo dyestuff called sukumo. The sukumo is in turn fermented in wood-ash lye to create a natural indigo vat. He says his decision to work this way is one that consciously favors slower, natural processes and materials over more immediate, synthetic options. Today, with petroleum-derived indigo readily and cheaply available, the choice to plant, transplant, weed, harvest, winnow, dry, and compost the indigo by hand is not one of necessity. Instead Ricketts contends it is a conscious act of recognition that all the energy extended in the farming and processing of the indigo plants is just as much a part of the final dyestuff as the indigo molecules themselves.

Ricketts' own experiences with indigo—first as an apprentice in Japan, followed by years of working with and learning from this dye—made him aware of a connection that reaches back to his teacher's teachers and the people they learned from, back into a past in which the processes he uses were developed through the accumulated experiences of all who have ever worked with indigo.

Dede Styles is a Buncombe County native who comes by her art naturally through the mountain traditions of fiber arts. Her grandmother, Mabel Allen, was a weaver and a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Styles accompanied her grandmother to guild events and learned how to spin by watching another guild member at work and practicing on the old Appalachian high-wheel spinning wheel that was part of her grandfather's collection. (She uses a high-wheel spinning wheel today.)

Styles learned the art of dyeing early as well. Her mother had a great interest in native plants, and shared much of her knowledge with her children. By the time Styles began to study the traditional process of creating natural dyes, she already knew how to recognize the plants that she needed. Dede Styles holds a master's degree in Early Childhood Education. She has demonstrated widely at festivals and fairs, at the Mountain Farm Museum, the Biltmore Estate, and many other venues.

Melanie Wilder is a weaver, natural dyer and fiber artist who has dedicated the past 20 years to learning and teaching the fiber skills she so loves to people of all ages. Studying sustainable agriculture and weaving in college, she has spent that last eight years reviving the weaving program at Warren Wilson College, where she supervises the Fiber Arts Crew. She is most interested in how process crosses into our daily living and how these choices can help shape our footprint on the future. She is active in Local Cloth, previously serving as board chair, and helped set up the Fiber and Dye Studio. She says, "There is nothing more delightful than being in my dye garden or at my loom. Combining the meditative processes of gardening, dyeing, spinning and weaving, creates great joy and a reminder to slow down, listen and observe what nature has given to us."