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Tumeric Eco-Printing

Photosensitive printing uses a surface coated in a pigment that changes colour when you expose it to sunlight. To create images, you can lay objects or cut out stencils onto this surface to block the light and create shadows. You may have seen blue cyanotype prints, which are made using this method but involve very harsh chemicals. However, there are many bright pigments found in plants that can be used in a similar way to create a more eco-friendly version of these prints called anthotypes.

Using natural materials is a way to slow down our consumption. It can also help us to feel more connected to the environment. This technique for Tumeric eco-printing can help us reflect on the beauty and diversity of the natural world. You can also use it as a base for your creative journalling or as part of a zine. Visit www.makingforchangeexpo.com/how-to-make-a-zine for more information about zines and a how-to instruction sheet.

Using turmeric produces lovely yellow and warm brown tones. You can research and experiment with different plants to achieve different colours – spinach and beetroot work well.

Tools and materials

- Powdered Turmeric
- Rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer
- A small container, like a tub, bowl or cup
- Washing up gloves
- A tray or tablecloth to protect your working surface
- A large paintbrush
- Paper to print onto
- Some objects you'd like to make prints of
- A sheet of clear glass or plastic – the glass out of an old photoframe works well



Method

Your finished image will be a silhouette of whatever you lay on the paper. Leaves, flowers or twigs in interesting shapes are a great place to start. Be careful – turmeric stains everything, including your hands! Make sure you wear gloves and cover your clothes and the surface you're working on to protect them.

If you work in sunlight, it will start to develop your image before you're ready, so it's best to prepare your paper inside with as little light as possible. Once it's ready, the paper can be stored out of the light in a box or cupboard until a sunny day when you're ready to use it.

1

Pour rubbing alcohol or hand sanitiser into the small container and mix in turmeric powder a spoonful at a time until you have a mixture the consistency of runny paint. You won't need much to cover a few pieces of paper – start with a small cup or about 50ml worth of the mixture

2

Paint your paper with a thin layer of the mixture. Let it dry for a few minutes and then add a second layer. It doesn't need to be thick, just enough to stain the paper.

3

Leave the papers out overnight to dry. Once they've dried completely, you'll notice a crusty layer of excess turmeric on the surface. This can be brushed away easily and you'll end up with a smooth bright yellow colour. If you brush it into a container it can be saved and used for more prints later.

4

When you're ready to print, lay the prepared paper out in a sunny place with your object on top. If it's something that it likely to blow away in the wind, like a leaf, lay your clear sheet of glass or plastic over it as well – this will hold the paper and object down without blocking the sun.

5

Leave it out in the sun to develop. The time it takes will vary - the brighter the day, the faster it works. If it's very sunny, the print may be done after an hour but if there are clouds it may take 3-4. Don't move your object to check if it's done, it has to stay in exactly the same spot. Try leaving out a test piece next to your work with a simple object like a book or mug on it, which you can peek under without worrying.

6

After a couple of hours, your prints should be finished! Where it's been exposed to the sun, the turmeric layer will have lightened, leaving the area in shadow a darker yellow. When you bring them back inside you'll notice that this area gets even darker over time, making your image more obvious.

7

Repeat and enjoy experimenting with different found objects, or cut-out stencils of your own! If you want to display your pieces, make sure you keep them out of direct sunlight or it will fade them.