

Alissa Ujie Diamond 2024

**Foraged  
Art Materials in  
So-called  
Western New York  
Summer/Fall**

**September 2024  
Alissa Ujie Diamond**

## Foraging Poem (for consideration)

Who belongs to this land?  
Who does this land belong to?

How did you get here?  
How did these plants get here?  
What makes a place?  
What makes a home?  
Was I invited?

Did you know these plants are alive?  
Did you bring anything to offer to them?  
What do you need?  
Do they need from you?

What is the right thing to say to a plant when  
you ask for its leaves?  
Excuse me? Thank you? Bless you?

How will I know if fruits don't want to be taken?

## Identifying Wild Grapes (*Vitis spp.*)

**Plant Shape:** Climbing vine, young vines are green and thin while older vines can be woody and as thick as a human arm. Grape vines have tendrils that wrap around nearby objects

**Most often found in:** untended areas- parking lots, untrimmed fences, hedgerows, often near creeks and rivers. Often grows in areas poison ivy also likes so look out!

**Leaf Arrangement:** alternate

**Leaves:** heart-shaped, lobed leaves with toothed edges, typically hand-sized

**Bark:** Bright brown with bark that peels off in strips on older branches.

**Parts to forage for art:** grapes show up in late summer, twigs can be harvested any time of year

## Making Wild Grape Ink (PURPLE)

Pick **2 cups of wild grapes**

In an old pot, boil grapes with **1/2 cup water**, squashing berries occasionally with a fork for 10 minutes or until it thickens

Pour the mix through a fine strainer, catching the ink in a container, and discard the solids

Add a **few whole cloves**, and keep the ink in the fridge to keep it from molding/fermenting

## Making Wild Grape Vine Charcoal

Snip woody sections of vine to desired length (pieces about the size of a pinky finger work best) and let dry for a couple of days

Wrap vine sections tightly in a bundle in 2 layers of aluminum foil and put into a fire for 1 hour. When cool, unwrap and pull out charcoal

## Identifying Plant Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

**Plant Shape:** Large Tree

**Leaf Arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf Shape:** Pinnate (made of many leaflets that come off one main leaf stem/reachis)

**Bark:** grayish brown bark with deep groves, forming rough diamond-shaped patterns

**Part to forage for ink:** round green hulled fruits (nuts inside a green hull) range in size from about the size of a golf ball to the size of a tennis ball show up in the summer. They are best for ink in the late fall when the hulls on the outsides of the nuts start to fall off. Wear gloves when you handle them as they stain and can irritate skin!

## Making Black Walnut Ink (BROWN)

Combine **2 cups black walnut hulls** (about a dozen) with **2 cups water** in an old pot

Heat to a boil and let boil for 3 to 4 hours until you have a dark brown thick liquid (check periodically to prevent burning!)

Pass the liquid through a fine strainer, discarding solids.

Filter again through a coffee filter in a funnel over a jar to catch the filtered liquid.

Add a **few whole cloves** (to prevent mold) and store covered.

## Identify Oak Trees

**Plant Shape:** Usually large trees

**Most often found in:** forests and parks, yards, campuses, and street trees

**Leaf Arrangement:** alternate

**Leaves:** come in many shapes, but always bilaterally symmetrical, can be lobed, toothed or entire margins. Deciduous but often hold leaves way into winter

**Parts to forage for ink:** acorn caps

## Making Oak Acorn Cap Ink (GREY)

Put **2 cups washed acorn caps** (the older and nastier looking the better) in a large old pot.

Cover with water, add 1/2 a crushed iron supplement pill or a few rusty nails, and boil until the liquid is reduced to about 2 cups (should take around 2 hours depending on the size of your pot. Check occasionally and add water if the pot gets too dry during boiling).

Test out the ink. If it's not dark enough for you, put it back into the pot with more acorn caps and iron or rusty items.

## Identifying Buckthorn

(*Rhamnus cathartica*)

**Plant Shape:** shrub or small tree, often quite dense

**Most often found in:** untended areas-fencelines, field edges, etc.

**Leaf Arrangement:** alternate but can be so close to opposite it's hard to tell, branches often have terminal spine

**Leaves:** shiny, oval-shaped, serrated edges, deciduous. Won't have leaves in winter, but stays green late into fall and gets leaves early in spring

**Bark:** Brown or gray bark with white lenticels (white horizontally elongated spots)

**Parts to forage for ink:** bunches of 1/4" black berries in fall

## Making Buckthorn ink (GREEN)

\*WEAR GLOVES WHEN HANDLING LYE-very caustic\*

mix 1/4 teaspoon lye crystals with 1/4 cup water and label jar clearly and keep away from kids and pets.

Put **4 cups buckthorn berries** in a gallon sized clear plastic resealable bag, and gently use your hands to crush the berries from the outside of the bag (careful not to pop the bag).

Cut off a tiny bit of one of the bag's bottom corners, and squeeze the juice out fo the hole into a glass container through a sieve or coffee filter.

Discard seeds (they are aggressive plants so **do not** just throw them outside)

Using a glass dropper, add a few drops of **lye water mixture** to the juice until you get the color you want, and then mix in a few drops of gum arabic (optional)

## Identifying Yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*)

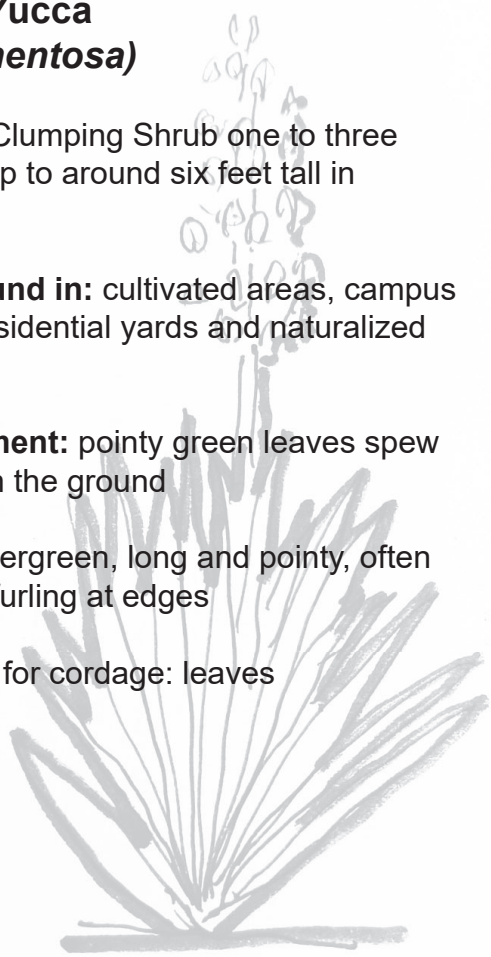
**Plant Shape:** Clumping Shrub one to three feet tall, stalk up to around six feet tall in spring/summer

**Most often found in:** cultivated areas, campus landscapes, residential yards and naturalized in many areas.

**Leaf Arrangement:** pointy green leaves spew in a clump from the ground

**Leaf Shape:** evergreen, long and pointy, often with strings unfurling at edges

**Part to forage** for cordage: leaves



## Making Yucca Cordage

Cut a few yucca leaves, using a knife to cut as close to the ground as possible

On a cutting board, use the edge of a metal spoon to scrape the green flesh off the leaves until only a sheaf of long fibers remains. Roll up the fibers and allow them to dry for a few days. These can be stored indefinitely.

Briefly soak fibers in water until pliable, then twine: Take a few fibers and twist them until the doubles over on itself. Then continue by twisting each strand in one direction, allowing the combined cord to twist in the other direction. Continue to twist each ply, and when either of the plies gets short, incorporate more dampened fibers.

For step-by-step twining instructions, see:  
<https://www.jonsbushcraft.com/cordage%20making.htm>

## References

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- "Yucca Filamentosa (Adam's Needle Yucca, Curlyleaf Yucca, Spoonleaf Yucca) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox." n.d. NC State Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox. Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/yucca-filamentosa/>.

## Note on foraged art supplies

"Fine" art supplies, the kind you buy at the store will generally give you consistent, replicable, and stable effects.

Foraged supplies are unpredictable: they change as they dry, fade, break, fray, color and shade-shift, get moldy, bubbly, are often pH-reactive, act out when contained, get gassy on the shelf, and are all-around much more weird.