

How to Make Ink from Black Grapes

A step-by-step guide by Ruth Siddall

This recipe explains a method to extract a beautiful purple ink from black grapes. This process extracts various anthocyanin group pigments which are typically shades of red, purple and blue. Makers beware, the anthocyanins do not make stable pigments or dyes! As dyestuffs, they will fade rapidly due to repeated washing and exposure to light. As inks, they are slightly more stable, as works on paper are not washed. There is a good chance that this ink will eventually fade to grey ... however in the short term, it produces an astonishing colour, perfect for writing purple prose.

1. Buy the blackest black grapes you can find. I find the best range of grapes are available in Mediterranean local supermarkets, inevitably they will be cheaper than those from supermarkets too.

2. Put a handful of the grapes into a small pan with around half a mug (200 ml) of water. You do not want to make gallons of this ink as it does not last forever.

3. Bring the water to the boil. At first you will see no colour change in the water, but as it approaches boiling point, the colour floods out of the grapes. When boiling, mash the grapes with a potato masher and turn down the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Do not heat for longer than this as the fruit will become too pulpy and this will taint the ink.



4. After 10 minutes, remove from the heat and strain the ink through a coffee filter paper in a funnel into a glass jar, and leave to cool.

5. Add around half a teaspoon of liquid gum Arabic and stir. At this stage, the ink will be a wine-red to pink colour (exact colour depends on the grape variety). When cool, the ink can be stored in a fridge and will last a few weeks.

Tip: Adding whole cloves to the ink can act as a preservative and increase its shelf life.

6. Anthocyanin inks oxidise when exposed to air. Drawing or painting with the ink will initially produce a pale red pink, but this will oxidise on drying to a blue-purple shade. Experiment with different grapes for different shades.



Tip: Many of the anthocyanin compounds present in grapes are rich in sugar which can make thick layers of the inks sticky, so apply thinly. The sugar crystals will produce a slight sparkle on the surface of the ink.



Ruth Siddall, May 2020