

# dye camp

artists with no wet studio pool  
their resources each summer

*I* live in a high-rise apartment in the city that is perfect for many things—but dyeing isn't one of them. There just isn't enough space to spread out and make the kind of mess that dyeing requires. Yet, I love to dye fabrics for my quilts. So, once a year, I meet up with similarly space-challenged artists for Dye Camp, where we dye up big batches of fabrics—in my case enough to last a year.

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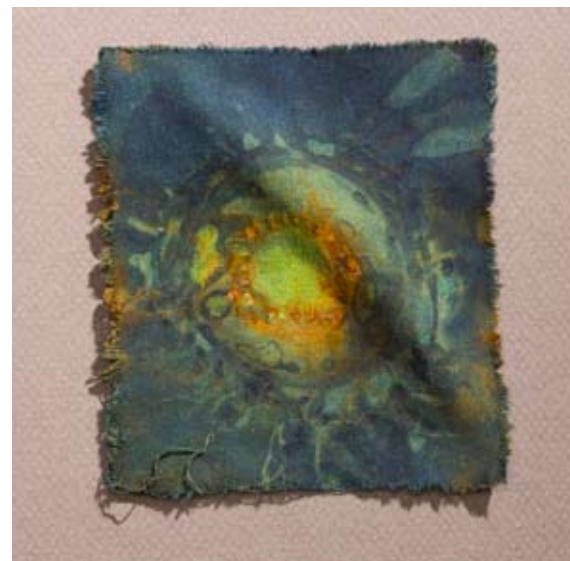
Dye Camp began about 10 years ago with a group of eight or so artists who pooled their supplies and tools and rented the dye studio at a local arts college (Oregon College of Arts and Craft) for three days each August. Everyone brought their own fabric and materials prepared for dyeing. The timeframe of three days in a row was very full, but relaxed, and allowed for some exchange of ideas, new technique experiments and a lot of laughter.

We had full use of the dye studio at the college, so there was lots of room to spread out, and it was well-suited to the mess of the task. All dye was ready to go in bottles on the first day, after being mixed a few days prior to camp by a rotating group of campers. It seemed there was always someone trying something new or one of those, “What would happen if we...?” moments going on. I was fortunate to have been invited as a newbie to

participate in Dye Camp and have made some dear friends from the experience as well as learning way more about dying fabric than I can recall. The most important piece of information I took away from that first year was to never hesitate to try an idea.

Since then, the group still contains about eight people, although some campers are new and others have moved on. The last few times we have met we have used indigo only. We meet at the home of our fearless leader, Elaine, who has a covered, cracked driveway and a family willing to accept blue in their lives for a weekend. We communicate via email to set a date and request the number of buckets we want to work with. We each pay our own way and bring food to share. People meet the afternoon before to mix the buckets. We carpool when we can to prolong the talking/designing/visiting time.

We start at 9 a.m. and try to be cleaned up by 4-ish. If it rains, we move in under the roof, closer together. We hang our fabric on racks in the backyard. Everyone talks as much as possible, and a few times we have had guests for the lunch break (artists who are not ready to dye, but want to connect with the group). I spent two weeks rusting, clamping, and



An example of Tricia's fabric made at Dye Camp.

soaking fabric before the event this year, to prepare.

I learn new tidbits every year and love meeting new friends and hearing about everyone's family. We have one big long table to hold tools, and everyone contributes and uses from the table. In this communal approach, it is understood that everything on the table is fair game.

When we depart, we divide up the tools—buckets, clamps, racks, etc.—and a few kindly souls store them in their basements between uses. In keeping with our communal approach, these tools are available to any member of the group year round. The core members of the group are an important part of why Dye Camp works. Sharing, without competition, makes all the difference.

My husband calls us the Indigo Girls.

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by **trisha hassler**



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