

Walnut Ink

by H.L. Slaine ni Chiarain

I came across a lot of different recipes for producing a tannin-based ink. They basically all include:

Tannins	oak galls or walnuts	Galls create a darker ink
Liquid	water, vinegar, or wine	Any liquid for extracting the tannins
Iron	copperas, vitriol	Rusty nails or an iron pot also works
Gum arabic	crystals or liquid	Adds body and sticking power to the ink

Heat is used to get the walnuts to release the tannins into the liquid but letting them **rot** in a bucket for a few months will work, too.

This is what I used:

20 Walnuts

Enough water to cover them

1 1/2 tablespoons vinegar

1 1/2 tablespoons gum arabic

Crack the walnuts with a hammer or nut cracker and place them in a iron pot. Simmer at low heat for 2 hours or longer if necessary. Stir often. If the water gets low through evaporation add more.

Strain the liquid into another container. Dump the walnut pieces and clean out the iron pot. Place the liquid back in the iron pot and simmer some more. Add the vinegar and gum arabic. Stir. Allow the liquid to reduce by about half. Strain it through a coffee filter into a bottle. You should now have ink!

This process wasn't as messy as I expected. Spilled walnut juice wiped off the counters and pans easily, even after 2 days.

Web Sites for Making Walnut Ink

<http://vantassle.freetcp.com/walnut.htm>. An SCA member's ink experience. Basis of my recipe.

<http://www.geocities.com:0080/CollegePark/Library/2036/ink.html>

Web Sites for Oak Gall Ink or Ink in General

<http://www.know.nl/ecpa/ink/>. An excellent site. More than you ever needed to know! Since they are concerned about how ink corrosion affects historic manuscripts, there is a lot of the background science at this site.

<http://vantassle.freetcp.com/gallink.htm>

http://www.meridies.org/as/dmir/ScribalArts/period_inks.html

Bibliography

Agricola, G., *De Re Metallica*, first Latin edition 1556, Translated by Herbert Clark Hoover and Lou-Henry, Dover Publications Inc., New York (1912). A primary source.

Bayard, Tania, *A Medieval Home Companion, Housekeeping in the 14th Century*. Harper Perennial, a division of Harper Collins Publishers; New York: 1992. The last page has an ink recipe.

Thompson, Daniel V., *The Materials and Techniques of Medieval Painting*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956. This is based on Cennini's 15th century artist's handbook.

Thompson, J.C., *Manuscript Inks*, The Caber Press, Portland, Oregon, 1996. I haven't seen this book, but I've heard that it's very good.