

## The Fermented Indigo Vat: An Introduction

© Catharine Ellis, as posted to the blog: Natural Dye: Experiments and Results

Last year, I made the decision to stop travel/teaching. It's been a long journey since my first weaving in 1970, my first dyeing in 1972, my first teaching in 1976 and my commitment to natural dye in 2008. This year I will turn 74 years old. I am also a grandmother for the first time and am actively involved in the unfolding life of a 18 month old little boy (who makes us smile every day).

What I have not done, is to stop learning, exploring, or asking questions about natural dye, dyeing, weaving, and/or how they might combine. Slowing some things down in my life is giving me to time to think more deeply about others, particularly indigo fermentation.

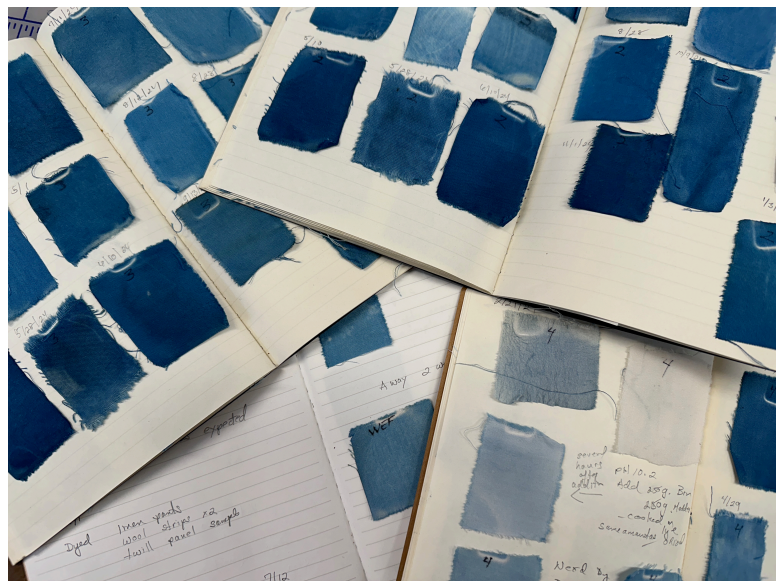


**“Lessons”**, a queen size quilt by Catharine Ellis using early woven shibori samples. Border fabric has been dyed with indigo using a fermentation vat.

Some time ago, Joy Boutrup and I discussed the possibility of another dye book that would expand what we presented in The Art and Science of Natural Dyes (Schiffer, 2019). While contemplating this dilemma, I came across the following quote from Annie Dillard:

*"One of the things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes."*

So now, Joy and I have together made the decision that I would share the information I have learned by using blogposts, instead of writing another book. Through a number of upcoming posts, I will discuss the process of indigo fermentation vats, the experiments I have done, and what I have learned about making, maintaining, and dyeing in those vats. I will explain, to the best of my ability, what is happening in those vats and why. Hopefully, this will encourage more of you to try fermented indigo vats and will provide enough information for the a high likelihood of success. Each post will contain a link to a downloadable pdf version, which you are welcome to print and kept for studio reference. I would ask that you be respectful of this information, but you are most welcome to share the link to my blog for reference.



Numerous tests are taken regularly from each vat and are an important record and "trouble-shooting guide."