



Hilltop Cloud

Time Travellers Club

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July-17

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Dear Club Member,

This is the second time we've used this particular colour as inspiration. In March 2016 we visited the Saffron Revolution, a period when Buddhist Monks in Burma played a key role in protesting against the ruling Military Junta.

This month we're looking at the dye plant itself, it's the most expensive spice in the world, often costing more per gram than gold (because of this the monks robes are often dyed with Turmeric). Saffron is the stigma from a crocus, when the plant flowers in autumn mornings it's a race against time for pickers to harvest the crop before the flowers wilt. It takes 150 flowers to give just 1g of dried Saffron, the average picker can pick over 3000 flowers in an hour.

Saffron is now grown all over the world, but the plant is native to Southwest Asia. The first written record is from the 7th Century BC in an Assyrian botanical treatise, but Saffron pigments have been found in Iranian wall paintings that date to 50,000 years ago. Alexander the Great used saffron in many of his dishes, and even bathed in saffron water as a curative for battle wounds. The Romans spread saffron growing throughout their empire, as far north as Britain, the town Saffron Waldon is named after the Saffron growing industry, which reached its height in Medieval times, but by the 18th Century growing had ceased. In America Saffron was grown mostly grown in Pennsylvania. Iran is now where most Saffron is produced, but increasing amounts are being grown in Afghanistan.

The high value has always meant that unscrupulous traders would attempt to pass off other products as saffron. In medieval times this could lead to execution if caught. Even now there is no international standard for the various grades of Saffron, making it hard for the end consumer to know that they've got what they paid for. Although the colour can be mimicked by other spices like Turmeric or Safflower, they both taste very different to Saffron, particularly when used in sweet dishes, usually bread based buns such as ones made in Cornwall and Sweden. As a dye, the colour is stunning in the short term, but unfortunately this colour doesn't last, the pigment is very non-stable in light.

Happy Spinning,

Katie