



Dyeing in the 1700s

In this [#TallShipTuesday](#), our historical interpreter and costumer, Jessie taught us how sailors on board *Providence* would have gotten dressed to prepare for watch. They talked briefly about two dyes that were used at the time: Indigo and Madder Root, but there were [many methods](#) that artisans would use to dye fabric in the 18th century.



The Indigo Plant used for blue dyes (Left) and Madder Plant used for red dyes (Right) in 18th Century America

Throughout history, all over the world, people would look for natural ingredients to craft special recipes, making the most vivid and durable dyes they could. When Europeans gained access to the Americas, entire companies were created to find those resources and bring them back. Just two years after its founding, the Virginia Company of London's publicist [wrote to investors](#) about the hopes the company had to bring back rich new dyes to use like Cochinell: an insect (though once thought to be a seed or berry) that creates the most vibrant red dyes. Unfortunately, many of these dyes were found mostly in South America, not North America.

Until the Revolutionary war, much of the dyeing process was [not done in the colonies](#), except for a few producers in the northeast. Once the war began, however, many manufacturers began making and dyeing fabric to lessen the reliance on British textiles, and aid in the war effort.

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