

# Blouse



This project began with some diaphanous cotton/silk fabric that was never quite the right shade of white - instead of the bright white I was hoping for, it arrived almost a cream or bone, and not at all suitable for the blouse I had in mind. It sat in my stash for several years, waiting for my return to Temuair and its perfect moment.

I'd wanted to make a Blouse for a long while - long before I returned to Temuair full-time - but I dreaded the dyeing of it, knowing that all my previous efforts at dyeing period-appropriate cotton or linen resulted in soft pastels that easily faded in the sun, not at all the bright tigerlily orange I'd need. It wasn't until I'd found myself dyeing some silk for another project that it dawned on me to put two and two together, remembering that old cotton/silk and reasoning that surely in Temuair an Aisling's Blouse would not be a mundane peasant's mere linen or cotton but would surely be at the very least *mixed* with silk, that miracle fiber spun by worms on their tiny wheels. And since it is well known that silk takes up dye much better than a plant fiber like cotton or linen, so I could be assured anything made from this long-neglected fabric would take up dye nicely, no matter how creamy it was to start.

With the plan in place, I began the creation of my Blouse by [selecting](#) my [patterns](#), one based upon a 17th century Italian chemise and the other based in the 18th century. The simple shapes reflect times when fabric was precious and could not be spared to waste on curves and tailoring such an everyday garment - triangular gores in the skirt and gussets in the armpit were used to improve fit instead.



Sewing kicked off by running my longest seams through the Tailoring Machine, but beyond those four initial runs, the entire project was hand-stitched with needle and cotton thread. Every seam is what is called “flat-felled”, wherein a length of fabric extends beyond the seam, then is folded back to capture the other edge and securely stitched, fully enclosing the edges and ensuring a clean and secure finish.



The neckline was very casually gathered while being test-worn and the edges enclosed to prevent unraveling using a slim length of fabric taken from the bottom edge of the hem. While a historically accurate chemise would have a much longer skirt and sleeves, a Blouse is a brief garment and I have maintained that here.



With the sewing complete, next came the dyeing process. Historically, dyes have been made up of the natural materials of the planet - bark, roots, leaves, fruits, fungi, insects, snails! - and Temuair seems no different. Proper natural dyeing follows a three step process guided by a series of chemical measurements and formulae - first you thoroughly wash your items, then you chemically prepare them for dyeing, then you dye them. To chemically prepare my fully sewn chemise, I simmered it for 30 minutes with aluminum potassium sulfate, in order to prepare the silk fibers to properly adhere to the dye. Included in that bath was a length of silk ribbon, intended for a contrasting stripe of pink at the hem. Maintaining a proper temperature at this point remains critical.



For the main dyestuff of this dress I used little more than the commonly available skins of yellow onions. These can be easily saved up at home over time or you can gather them by the handful at the grocery store and pay a cent by weight. I also added a small handful of chipped Osage Orange (a native American tree) bark for a more lemony tone, then the whole soup was simmered lightly for an hour until it yielded a beautiful golden color.



I strained out all the plantstuffs and returned the clarified dye to the pot, then added my fully mordanted chemise.



I allowed the chemise to simmer for another half hour, then allowed it to soak for the long overnight, pulling it out in the morning to reveal a beautiful amber.



The silk ribbon used for the hem was dyed by the same methods using a bath of cochineal - small insects that live exclusively on cactuses and can produce a range of colors from bright orange to the deepest purple, depending on how it is prepared. For this project I aimed for a classic fuschia. Once complete, I attached this ribbon to the hem of the skirt using a million tiny stitches to very intentionally secure it to the bottom edge of the skirt, but a much wider and more unobtrusive stitch to attach it up top, mostly to reduce the visibility of the amber thread.







