



"Arbor Brasilia. The Brassill tree" from John Parkinson. *Theatrum Botanicum: the theater of plants: or An herball of large extent...*, London: Printed by Tho. Cotes, 1640. Chapter 17, p. 1644.

Please feel free to contact me at [marie-france.lemay@yale.edu](mailto:marie-france.lemay@yale.edu) should you have any issues or questions before, during or after making the brazilwood ink. Have fun!

# Make at Home Brazilwood Ink Kits

## Supplies List

### Included in kit

- 20 grams of brazilwood (mixture of shaved and powdered brazilwood/sappanwood)
- 7 grams of alum (potassium aluminium sulfate)
- 4 grams of gum arabic
- Two coffee filters
- Cheesecloth (3 squares, 9 x 9 inches)
- One string (24 inches)
- One adjustable mylar funnel
- Watercolor paper (2 sheets, 5 ½ x 7 inches)

### Additional supplies, tools or materials you will need

- 1-1¼ cup (250-275 ml) of red wine vinegar (if you can't find red wine vinegar you can use white vinegar or water)
- Newsprint, paper, rags, etc. to cover your work area (the ink is made with a dye and a mordant, it will stain textiles, paper, even wood)
- Small saucepan or something similar to simmer the ingredients together
- Small jar with lid that can hold 1 to 2 cups of liquid (Mason jar or recycled jam jar, etc.)
- Metal spoon or stirring stick (or disposable equivalent)
- Latex or plastic gloves if you don't want to stain your hands (stains will wash away after a few handwashes)
- Apron to protect your clothes from drips or splashes

### The recipe

You will be making a brazilwood ink following a recipe found in Theodore Turquet de Mayerne's manuscript ([Sloane MS 2052](#)) held at the British Library. The link above will take you to the BL's page for the manuscript where you will find a description of the manuscript and its contents. The manuscript has been fully digitized and the recipe can be found on folio 62r (see image on the following page).

The translation of the recipe is provided on the last page of the "Brazilwood Rosette, Lake & Ink Recipes" PDF.







# Making the ink

## A few tips & suggestions

The ink recipe is simple and pretty straightforward to follow. The proportions of the recipe have been scaled down and the ingredients provided have been pre-weighed.

When boiling the brazilwood and alum in the vinegar, keep an eye on your saucepan and check frequently the level of your liquid. You might consider simmering gently rather than boiling. It will take longer to reduce the volume of liquid by half by simmering but it might help avoid overcooking or completely evaporating your liquid. If this happens, you can add more vinegar or water to top off to the desired final volume.

For straining, we provided you with three options:

- You can use the three layers of cheesecloth and tie them around the rim of your jar using the string (see image 1-3). If the dye solution is slow to filter through, you can untie the string and gather the corners of the cheesecloth and twist to help squeeze out the liquid (see image 4)
- You can gently mold the coffee filter in a similar way to the cheesecloth around the rim of your jar and tie it with the string if necessary (see image 5).
- You can use the adjustable mylar funnel provided, and place the coffee filter inside. The funnel might be a bit too large for smaller jars. Make sure your funnel is stable before pouring your dye solution for straining.
- Cheesecloth will let your dye solution pass through more easily than the coffee filter for faster filtering. However, cheesecloth will let fine powder pass through and a deposit might settle at the bottom of your jar of finished ink after a few days. Because the pores of the coffee filter are much smaller, they will prevent some of the fine powder from passing through. For the same reason, pores will easily get clogged and filtering might take up to 12 hours, sometimes longer.
- One option, for faster filtering and minimizing deposits, is to first filter using the cheesecloth and filter a second time using the coffee filter.

Dissolving the gum arabic in the filtered dye solution will take some time. Leaving the gum to soak overnight in your ink should melt most of it but if you want to accelerate the process you can stir your solution frequently or gently heat it while stirring.

The recipe suggests filtering again after the addition of gum, I would recommend to not do so, especially with the coffee filter, as the filtering will be slowed considerably and a portion of the gum will remain in the filter.

The finished ink will be transparent and have the approximate consistency of coffee creamer or half-and-half.

**Note:** In images 3, 4 & 6 the brazilwood solution appears brown because the alum mordant was not added at the beginning but at the end. Your solution should be pinkish red.



IMAGE 1



IMAGE 2



IMAGE 3



IMAGE 4



IMAGE 5



IMAGE 6