Video: Insect biology students learn art of bug-based dyes

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Cochineal bugs use a coloring as a defense mechanism, but humans have learned to use it to dye fabric. Before the advent of synthetic dyes, all dyes were made from insects or plants.

In CU Boulder Professor M. Deane Bowers' insect biology class, students experience what it's like to color fabric using insect-based dye. After grinding up dried cochineal bugs that Bowers purchases from Mexico or Peru, students pour the crushed insects into hot water, which turns red, pink and orange. The students dip fabric into the colored water to make tie-dye scarves.

Students taking Bowers' class study how insects interact with their environment and other organisms, examining insect morphology, physiology and development to build a context for understanding insect ecology, behavior and evolution.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder