



## Natural Inks and Reed Pens

### Reed Pens

Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) is an exotic, invasive reed that grows in wetlands and roadside ditches. It can be used to make reed pens by simply cutting with a utility knife. Cut a reed that is a comfortable size for a pen. Peel off leaves. If there are seed heads on the reeds, be sure not to transfer seeds to a new location. Cut the reed at an angle and then shape the tip to a point for a fine line, or to cut a square tip for calligraphy. Making a split up the center of the tip will help it hold more ink.

### Natural Ink Recipes

#### **Berry Ink (Pokeberry, Elderberry, Wild Grape, etc.)**

Smash berries and strain juice through a sieve lined with fabric or cheesecloth. If the berries are not very juicy, add just a little bit of water to help it run through the sieve. Any water added will make the ink thinner and the color lighter. For every  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of juice, add  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp salt and 1 tsp vinegar to help preserve it. Store in an air tight container away from light. Use quickly. Berry ink does not store well. Check the juice after a few days to make sure it is not fermenting or molding. Keep anything written with berry ink out of sunlight.

#### **Black Walnut Ink**

Warning: Black walnuts will stain everything! Use old utensils, wear rubber gloves and old clothes, and make this ink outdoors if possible. Remove the green hulls from black walnuts. Boil the hulls in water for an hour or more. The longer the hulls boil, the more color will be extracted. Add some rusty nails or a piece of steel wool to make the color darker. The iron reacts with the tannins in the plant material to produce a darker brown color. Periodically check the ink by dipping a pen and writing to see if the color and consistency are right. If it is too thin, keep boiling. Cool, strain, and store in an air tight container. Black walnut ink should last a long time in a bottle, but a little 100-proof vodka and whole cloves can be added as a preservative. Black walnut ink is waterproof and fade-resistant.

#### **Carbon Black Ink**

Make drawing charcoal: Cut 2 or 3 dry, dead sticks to about 6 inch lengths. Willow and soft woods work well. Wrap tightly in 2-3 layers of tin foil. Place the bundle on a fire that is almost burnt out and leave until the next day. With no air getting to them while burning, the sticks should turn to a completely black charcoal. Grind the charcoal to a very fine powder by rubbing on sandpaper or grinding with a mortar and pestle. Add several drops of honey to make a paste. Add water and mix until thin enough for ink. This ink is waterproof and fade-resistant.