Material References

Sources and Guides for Eco Art Practice

Eco Art Caucus of the Women's Caucus for Art

A developing resource guide | Reviewed October 12, 2026

A practical collection of references for exploring earth pigments, plant and mushroom colour, fibres, handmade paper, biomaterials and reclaimed supplies. Follow the linked organisations' instructions and product information to choose materials for your own practice.

Natural, biobased, biodegradable, compostable and recycled describe different qualities. Mineral earth pigments are not biodegradable. A plant-based ingredient does not establish that a finished work will biodegrade: binders, mordants, coatings and mixed materials matter. Reusing durable materials can also reduce the need for new supplies.

Before sourcing, consider what the work needs to do, how long it should last and how it can be repaired, reused or taken apart. For gathered materials, establish permission and local stewardship requirements. For purchased materials, ask about ingredients, provenance, technical guidance and disposal options. Supplier inclusion is a reference, not an endorsement of every product.

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Earth pigments, paint and place

References for investigating geological colour, paint composition and relationships with place.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
The Earth Pigments Company Pigments and paint-making references	Instructions for working with earth pigments and making paints with different binders. Useful for exploring colour through mineral materials.	Visit The Earth Pigments Company Free how-to library; commercial supplies. Select pigments and binders separately. Mineral pigments are not biodegradable, and some recipes use animal-derived ingredients.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
Natural Earth Paint Paint-making tutorials and supplies	Practical tutorials for artists working with earth and mineral pigments and alternative paint formulations.	Visit Natural Earth Paint Free tutorials; products are sold separately. Read the formulation for each product rather than applying a brand-wide environmental claim to every finished work.
Natural Pigments / Rublev Colours Technical articles and pigment information	Articles on pigment properties, binders and traditional painting materials support more informed material choices.	Visit Natural Pigments / Rublev Colours Commercial supplier with public articles. The range includes varied pigment types; the company name does not mean every product is an earth pigment or biodegradable.
Kremer Pigmente Pigment and binder reference catalogue	Product information helps artists distinguish earths, minerals, manufactured pigments and different binders.	Visit Kremer Pigmente Commercial catalogue. Consult individual technical documents and safety data sheets; select the appropriate regional store and confirm delivery before ordering.
Early Futures — Ochre Archive Research into ochre and earth colour	An artist-led archive for investigating the relationships among geological colour, places and material histories.	Visit Early Futures — Ochre Archive A research reference, not a guarantee of gathering access or a complete identification guide. Explore its associated resources when developing a place-based project.
Kauae Raro — How We Make Paint Whenua, earth pigments and Māori practice	A practical account of paint-making grounded in the collective's relationships with whenua and cultural knowledge.	Visit Kauae Raro — How We Make Paint Public reference from Aotearoa New Zealand. Read the collective's gathering guidance and cultural context alongside the method. Local access and stewardship matter.
Pigments Revealed International Natural pigment community and references	An artist and researcher network for investigating pigment practices, methods and material knowledge.	Visit Pigments Revealed International Some information is public; deeper resources may require paid membership. Follow the author and material context of individual contributions.

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Plant and mushroom colour

Sources for researching botanical and fungal colour and recording material experiments.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
Maiwa — Natural Dyes Natural dye guide and technical tutorials	Procedures for preparing fibres, using mordants and working with plant and other natural dyestuffs.	Visit Maiwa — Natural Dyes Free guide, including a PDF; commercial materials separately. The palette includes insect-derived dyes as well as plants. Match instructions to the fibre and dye.
Botanical Colors Natural dye instructions and supplies	Step-by-step references for dyeing, indigo processes and preparing fibres for colour.	Visit Botanical Colors Free instructions; U.S. commercial supplier. Check individual ingredients and mordants. Natural dyes vary in lightfastness and do not make an entire process impact-free.
Mushroom Color Atlas Mushroom dye and pigment reference	A visual research tool connecting fungi, colour, fibres and dye processes. Useful for selecting experiments and keeping comparisons.	Visit Mushroom Color Atlas Free online atlas, with a separate process guide. Colours depend on species, fibre and mordant; this is not a substitute for reliable species identification.
Mycopigments Mushroom dye resources	Specialist references support investigation of fungi as sources of textile colour.	Visit Mycopigments Public resource list; books, materials and learning activities may be paid. Use dye-specific instructions and distinguish gathering guidance from permission to collect.
Fibershed Community Natural Dye Archive Community dye records	A living collection of colour experiments connects local plants, materials and recorded processes.	Visit Fibershed Community Natural Dye Archive Free reference. Treat records as documented experiments; growing conditions, water, fibre and process can change the result.

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Fibres, textiles and handmade paper

Resources for finding fibres and learning how production and preparation affect a finished material.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
Fibershed — Community and Producers Regional fibre sourcing	A route to regional producers and affiliates for investigating wool, other fibres and local textile systems.	Visit Fibershed — Community and Producers Public directory, with a Northern California focus and a wider affiliate network. Availability and processing services vary; purchases are arranged with producers.
Textile Exchange — Fiber and Materials Matrix Comparing fibre impacts	Research framework for comparing material choices across climate, nature, people, animals and governance.	Visit Textile Exchange — Fiber and Materials Matrix A materials assessment reference, rather than an art-supply shop or universal ranking. Consider production and processing as well as fibre name.
Textile Exchange — Plant Fibers Plant-based textile research	A starting point for investigating fibres such as hemp and the production systems behind them.	Visit Textile Exchange — Plant Fibers Public overview and linked research. A plant origin alone does not establish the impact of cultivation, retting, processing, dyeing or finishing.
Carriage House Paper Papermaking fibres and instruction sheets	Practical information for handmade paper, including plant fibres, pulps and preparation.	Visit Carriage House Paper Free instruction sheets; U.S. commercial supplies. Check the particular fibre and process. Additives, coatings and inclusions affect the finished paper's next use.
Hand Papermaking Beginner articles and specialist references	Technical and artist-focused reading supports paper made with plant fibres and other experimental pulps.	Visit Hand Papermaking Public beginner articles; the magazine and some publications are paid. Useful for researching techniques before choosing equipment or supplies.

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Biomaterials and experimental composites

Starting points for testing grown and crafted materials; document the complete recipe and its performance.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
Materiom Commons Open biomaterial recipes	Recipe and research library for experimenting with biomass-based materials and composites.	Visit Materiom Commons Free access with registration. Check ingredients, equipment, performance data and author notes. Recipes are experimental; not all are vegan or independently certified compostable.
Grow.bio Mycelium and hemp casting materials	Ecovative's grow-it-yourself materials and instructions offer a route into moulded mycelium forms.	Visit Grow.bio Free instruction downloads; kits and material are purchased separately. U.S. source. Follow growing and drying instructions; coatings change the finished object's composition.
Fabricademy — Biofabricating Materials Public experimental materials handbook	Introduces crafted and grown materials, including bioplastics and other biofabrication experiments.	Visit Fabricademy — Biofabricating Materials Public curriculum reference; formal study is separate. Evaluate individual recipes and record durability, moisture response and ingredients before using them in a finished work.
MaterialDistrict Materials discovery database	A searchable source of material examples, including biomaterials and alternative composites.	Visit MaterialDistrict Discovery resource with manufacturer information. Confirm composition, available quantities and end-of-life evidence with the maker; a listing is not independent certification.

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Reclaimed materials and creative reuse

Ways to source existing materials for new artistic uses. Local inventory and eligibility vary.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
SCRAP Creative Reuse Recovered art and craft supplies	Creative reuse centres divert donated materials into artistic and educational use.	Visit SCRAP Creative Reuse U.S. network; generally low-cost retail rather than a universal free supply programme. Check the local centre's inventory, hours and donation rules. Materials have varied compositions.
Habitat for Humanity ReStores Building materials, tools and salvage	Local reuse stores can supply components for sculpture, installation, supports and studio needs.	Visit Habitat for Humanity ReStores Stores sell new and used donated goods. Inventory and policies are local. Confirm condition, dimensions and any previous finishes before planning a project.
Materials for the Arts New York City creative reuse	Redistributes donated supplies to eligible arts and community projects. Useful for artists working through qualifying NYC organisations.	Visit Materials for the Arts Free supplies require approved access. The FAQ includes fiscally sponsored artists making public projects; additional city artist-grantee access has been announced. Ask which route applies. Not unrestricted public warehouse shopping.
The Freecycle Network Local gifting and reuse	Community groups connect people giving materials and objects with people who can reuse them.	Visit The Freecycle Network Free local exchanges; membership and local rules apply. Availability is unpredictable. Confirm composition and condition directly with the person offering an item.

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Choosing materials and planning their next use

Practical references for evaluating material claims and considering the full life of a work.

Material or resource	Uses and ecological connection	Sourcing and useful details
Gallery Climate Coalition — Artist Toolkit Materials and studio choices	Artist-focused guidance for considering material use, production and climate impacts.	Visit Gallery Climate Coalition — Artist Toolkit Free practical reference. Start with using existing stock, reducing waste and choosing materials for the project's intended lifespan; consult linked guidance for specific materials.
USDA BioPreferred Understanding biobased content	Explains the USDA label and measurement of biological content in commercial products.	Visit USDA BioPreferred Free reference. Certification concerns biobased content; it does not by itself establish that a product or artwork is biodegradable, compostable or suitable to leave outdoors.
U.S. EPA — Plastics, Recycling and Composting Understanding end-of-life claims	Explains differences among biobased, biodegradable and compostable plastics and their disposal conditions.	Visit U.S. EPA — Plastics, Recycling and Composting Free reference. Match claims to the complete product and the receiving facility. Industrial compostability does not mean a material belongs in a home compost pile or natural habitat.

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