

Wednesday 23rd October 2019

Using plants from the garden: Flax/Yarrow

We like to make connection between the Visitor Centre and the Garden here at Hengistbury Head. Two years ago, Val grew blue flowered Flax. It's a meadow flower used to make textiles.

Retting (soaking) was needed to separate the fibres in the stems. Val laid them out, exposed to rain and sun. The fibres are hardened in this way and then bashed with a mallet. Fiddly and fine, it was important to obtain long filaments to spin. Much patience and colourful language led to successful extraction. It's amazing to imagine the intensive work required to achieve flax for garments.



Unrefined

Refined

Refined and washed

Val refined the fibres by combing and taking bits away. Della, another volunteer, spun the threads, making some as strong as 2ply. They were boiled in soda crystals and more bashing softened them. Now there is a skein of flax fibres which might begin a weaving for clothing.

Tea

Meanwhile Jo and Bridget have been searching for Yarrow leaves, Lemon Balm and Mint to make a soothing herbal tea.

However, the fungi are more tricky and we have decided to leave them alone. There is a variety of fungus growing after the wet weather, but identifying can be a risky business.

The fungi we see are the fruits of a wonderful network below the ground where some fungi are supplying tree roots with sugars to promote growth. Other kinds clear areas of bacteria so they might grow unaffected.

See you soon.

The Volunteer Gardeners at Hengistbury Head Wildlife Garden