Changing the Color of Fabrics / Dye your fabrics

Here we present tips and spots to find much more information out on the web including dye color recipe charts.

PREWASH YOUR FABRIC

Just a note here for people who are doing any kind of dyeing or coloring of fabric (or even just washing/drying fabric). Do a test run on a sample piece of fabric. Cut a square - either 4, 5 or 6 inch square - of your fabric. Trace around the fabric onto a piece of paper being very careful to note in which direction the warp (vertical) threads go and in which direction the weft (horizontal) threads go.

I have always tried to have one side be the selvage edge of the fabric that way I can identify which edge is which. If I can't use a selvage edge then I mark one edge in a way that makes it clearly identifiable.

Then dye and/or wash your fabric square exactly the way you intend to do your whole piece of fabric. Once you're done and the fabric square is dry then lay it back down on the piece of paper in exactly the same way you traced it earlier. Odds are that you'll find that your square has shrunk. And you'll be able to tell in which direction, horizontal or vertical, the shrinkage is greater by how much room there is between the original line and the edge of the fabric.

--Fran E

Dying Basics

OK, some "rules of thumb" for dyeing fabrics. These are the ones I've found work for me over the past 10 years: you may have others.

There are 2 kinds of dye: Fiber-reactive and Acid.

Fiber-reactive dyes (Procion is one brand) are good dyes for any kind of non-protein fiber that will take dye (linen, cotton, linen-cotton blends, rayon). These work well in cold water, are nice and bright, and are color-fast. Soda ash (sodium carbonate) is used to raise the acidity of the dye bath and "lock" the dye onto the fiber. Soda ash is also caustic; while plant-based fibers can take the harshness, it can make protein-based fibers harsh and brittle.

Acid dyes (Jacquard is one brand) are the preferred dyes for protein-based fibers (wool, silk, camel hair, dog hair, etc.). These are interesting fibers to dye, because you're manipulating the fiber at the cellular level. Most people are familiar with using acid dyes, but for those that have never done it, the process is (briefly):

Wet the fiber to be dyed, mix up the dye solution in a dye pot, add the fiber and let it soak, bring the dye solution slowly up to the temperature of hot tap water (about 120 degrees), add vinegar, and hold at that temperature for a period of time, then slowly bring the dye solution up to a full simmer and simmer for a period of time. Let cool slowly in the dye solution, then wash when it has completely cooled.
The reason for this long process is that by warming up the fiber in the dye solution, you are opening the cuticle on the fiber shaft, putting the dye into the shaft, and then closing the cuticle. The slow heating and cooling allows the fiber to adjust to the changes (no felting).

If you find you are still having problems with dye transfer after dyeing a piece of fabric, the problem is not usually color-fastness, but crocking. Crocking occurs when there is excess dye left on the fabric; if you've ever had a new pair of blue jeans rub blue onto a white shirt, this is crocking. Most fabrics crock when they are new (one reason to prewash everything)--I've had purchased fabrics that were so dye-laden when they came from the mill I had to wash them 3-4 times before being able to use them. To prevent serious crocking or dye transfer, make sure to wash the fabric in Synthrapol (available from Dharma Trading Co.) thoroughly; Synthrapol suspends the excess dye in the water and keeps it from going back onto the fabric. This may take 2-3 trips through the washer.

The key to maintaining the stiffness in silks such as dupioni or duchess satin is to keep from washing out the sericin. Sericin is a protein-based glue that the silkworm produces in the spinning process. Heat (such as hot water) dissolves this glue, so avoiding heat is essential. The best way to maintain the sericin in a piece of silk is to use Procion or other fiber-reactive dye, and set the dye using steam with vinegar in it; Dharma gives instructions on how to do this in their catalog. This will set the dye, but will not remove the excess; silk done this way should not be washed, and I would even have second thoughts about dry-cleaning. If the sericin has already been removed, you can add some of the "stiffness" back by rinsing the fabric in water with a little starch.

--Dawn Jacobson

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**Pot Dyeing**

There are two tricks to getting an even dye using the pot method. Get the fabric evenly wet in water before putting it in the dye pot.

The second think is to really stir the fabric around especially in, say the first 15 minutes when the bulk of the dye is absorbed. I just use a couple of thickish wood sticks to stir and flip the fabric around.

== Sue

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**Lightening Wool**

You might try very diluted bleach in cold water. About 2 tablespoons per 5 gallons mix the bleach thoroughly with the water and wet the fabric with plain cold water before adding to the bleaching water.

**WARNING:** many black dyes have a green base that will be the color that's prominent after trying to leach out the dye. Test on a scrap first. If the results are satisfactory continue. If the tone achieved isn't light enough, repeat with the original proportions of bleach and water before going to a stronger solution. At no time agitate the fabric or subject it to temperature shock as this is what felts wool. You might also want to add a little vinegar to the final rinse to neutralize the bleach and help soften the wool.

(Editor warning: be very careful with this technique... bleach can dissolve wool... so it must be very mild and completely washed out.)
I am a spinner and weaver and have had need to whiten wool upon occasion. It may sound odd, but I have always treated wool as I would hair; it is essentially the hair of a sheep. Accordingly, I solved the problem by using the same hydrogen peroxide used on hair to bleach the dye back out. I also use a mild shampoo to wash the wool, and a small amount of hair conditioner, if necessary, in water to soften it.

--Morgaine

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Mixing Colors to create something new

Make sure to do a test run.

You can't reuse dye once it's mixed. So for swatches, I'd measure small amounts and keep track of the ratios of one color to another. Say you want Arwen's coronation green. For your test you try 1 tsp. yellow and 1/2 tsp. blue. If that works, then when you dye your big piece, you use twice as much yellow as blue dye to get the right color.

== Anna

Find recipes for other colors here:

http://www.ritdye.com/Create_Custom_Color.9.lasso

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Dyeing Problems

Often you will hear that Polyester and polyester blends are not dyable. They aren't under most conditions, or only the natural part will take. That is and isn't true.

There are dyes available for synthetics. However, these are often rather heavy on the chemicals and/or require heat setting to take... and then may not be completely color fast. Check Out on the web for manufactures' information

Problems:

"Burn in" - getting the color deep enough may be so heavy in the chemicals that it weakens the fibers. This even sometimes happens in professional tie-dyes of synthetics. I've seen this the most in marbled fake suede and panne velvets.

There is no save for this situation. Scrap bin the fabric.

The color takes but even after following the setting instructions, the dye does not stay. It never stops fading in the wash. Sometimes this can be fixed by another setting agent.

See the company's website for instructions.

The color wears off on you skin or your chemise. Especially at heat and sweat point. Try a setting agent based on the company's web site.

The color radically changes at your body's heat and sweat points. Scrap bin the fabric.
The fabric is a bit splotchy after dying

Try to avoid this in the first place by making sure the fabric is completely wet before putting it in the dye bath. Air pockets can cause this problem.

Mix/Dissolve powered dyes completely in a small amount of water first, so that flecks of powder don't get on the fabric.

Keep stirring...

One technique I have found helpful is to divide the amount of dye I plan to use in half, and do the piece of fabric twice. I mostly just dye cottons for summer theater costumes, and in my washer the fabric sometimes comes out somewhat unevenly colored. So if I do it with half the dye the first time, and the other half of the dye the second time, the splotchyness tends to get evened out. I discovered this by accident when I just didn't use enough dye the first time to get the color dark enough, and so I had to put it through again with another package. I got the color I wanted, and the tone evened out.

== Sarah

Uneven coloring in dye baths is generally due to 2 things:

- not enough stirring (you may think that's unlikely in your washing machine, but it depends on how much fabric you packed into it, and how good your agitation cycle is)

- unevenly prepared fabric (as was mentioned about damp vs wet fabrics in another reply: if your fabric is damp, it will "wick" the dye into the fibers faster than if it's dry, and cotton wicks better when it's wetter).

Another thing that can cause splotches (more often lines of darker color) is insufficient rinsing. You need to rinse (acid) dyes until the water runs clear, and that can take a long while. Don't be too impatient, because excess dye that is not rinsed off will tend to migrate toward the tops of crinkles and ridges as you're wringing out your fabric. You can remove these darker lines by re-rinsing, unless they get set (a lot of dyes are heat-set: if you tumble-dry your dyed fabric with heat, or iron it, chances are, you'll be stuck with those splotches and lines).

==Jonatha

Fading Black

I've done a number of experiments with bleaching blacks, and the thing is, they most always don't bleach to the grey you're looking for. Depending on what color the base dye was that they used to get black, you'll most likely get a sickish looking orange or green. (If you bleach it long enough, you can sometimes come out with a very cool yellow-isch bone color... depends on the fabric.) Try a small snippit of your fabric first - just dab a little bleach on, or put it in some bleach & water. You'll see soon enough what you're going to get.

If you want to try fading it out, I'd try good-old-sunshine. On the other hand, blues and reds typically bleach down very nicely...
Coffee/Tea Dyeing

Whether you use tea or coffee, you want to make sure it is REALLY watered out if you are only going for an antiqued look. Otherwise, you’ll get the same brown that happens when you accidentally spill your cup of coffee on your clean white blouse, if you get me. If you want to antique a white outfit to cream color, consider using pure chamomile herbal tea. That will give the same golden-yellowy color you see in old lace and antique wedding dresses. That one can be used almost full strength, depending how aged you want the garment to look. ALWAYS test on swatches of your fabric to see if you like the results before you stain/dye your real garment. After soaking the swatch in the dye for 20-40 minutes, rinse the swatch until the fabric runs clear, let it dry, and compare it to the original fabric color. If it’s too dark, add water to the dye bath. Too light? Add more tea. Regular tea and coffee will give more of a brownish hue, like a garment that has not simply been stored a long time, but rather used and gotten dirty. You can use these at near-full-strength to dye a white cloth brown. Hot water dye baths will penetrate the fabric fibers more than cold baths, so consider playing with the temperature as well to get the amount of color you want.

As for gauze, it most likely will take the tea/coffee staining. The fiber content is more important than the weave. Natural fibers take dye better. Most gauze I’ve seen in the stores is 100% cotton, so it will probably work. Again, test on a swatch. Also, adding a cup of salt to a hot dye bath helps natural fibers absorb dye, due to osmosis. If you are attempting a true brown from white cloth, definitely add salt.

--N'stasha

I suggest dyeing it BEFORE you cut it to prevent shrinkage!
I went through several boxes of different kinds of herbal teas before I found just the right color I liked for my dress... testing strips of the lace in tea cups. I ended up going with a lemon chamomile. I liked the golden hue more than the brown (or red) of the other teas I had.

After I figured out the tea, here's how I did it...

In my largest pot, I heated up enough hot water to submerge all of the material, I put all the tea bags in and let them simmer (not boil, because too much of that breaks the bag) until they were well brewed... I did end up using an entire box!!!

I took out the bags and took it off the heat.

Then I carefully dipped the pre-wet material into the tea bath and made sure to keep stirring and pushing the material into the bath. (It kept wanting to float!)

It took probably about an hour before it had taken enough of the color... or until I THOUGHT it had... it was hard to tell. Then I carefully lifted it out (it was cool by now) and let it drip dry.

I did this with my white belt too... though I used darker teas. There's a picture on my website of my tea dyed dress:


It still is pretty white, but before it was a glaring 'here comes the bride' brilliant white. *L*
Dyeing Cheesecloth (for Nazguls)

Stick it in a lingerie bag, one of those mesh things which, being nylon, won't get dyed much. You might cut your pieces first, and use several of the bags in a washing machine. And use Rit dye, because that always comes out blotchy and uneven.

--Kayta

Try tying it in bunches - the way you tie-dye cloth only not as tight, so the dye penetrates, but if you tie it every couple of feet it should hold up ok.

--Naomi

I remembered I had 2 packages of cheesecloth leftover from making ghosts last Halloween. So I simmered a big ol' pot of hot water, and added a cup of salt, a tablespoon of fabric detergent, and a package of Rit dye. Cheesecloth is 100% cotton and incredibly cheap -- and it already looks distressed. It took only 1 pkg of black dye for the 6 yds of cheesecloth I had on hand, and I'm sure it would have dyed twice that. Remember to keep rinsing the cheesecloth until the water runs clear. (You can just throw it in the washing machine a bunch of times.) No need to pre-wet the cheesecloth before dyeing, as irregularity in the color will happily add to the distressed look!

--N'stash

Dyeing Vinyl

You can hand wash vinyl and hang dry it, so you can dye it. I would not use a washing machine (it might damage the vinyl) or dryer (heat might cause some melting/distortion).

Too much heat (boiling water) will affect the vinyl but normal water washing will not.

You can do a bit of over-dyeing of vinyl/p-leather with RIT dyes but you must be sure to let the water cool down from the boiling temperature (wait 5-10 minutes depending on the pot size). Experiment with a scrap piece to see that the water is cool enough not to warp the vinyl/p-leather.

Susan T.

Links out on the web

Great sources for fabric dyeing information

How to..

http://www.dharmatradings.com/info/
Not just dyes but everything related to changing the color of fabrics.
Also check the menu index to the left of the main info.
The ABC's of Dyeing

http://www.ritdye.com/Dyeing_Techniques.6.lasso

Dye term glossary

Choosing the right dye for the right fabric.

Dye Techniques

Dylon fact sheets
http://www.dylon.co.uk/help.html