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# One Bucket Fabric Dyeing

by **Terri Stegmiller**

It's hard to believe that I dyed all of these fabrics all at the same time, in one bucket. I didn't believe this would work either until I tried it.

Remember to wear your respirator and gloves for safety, when working with the soda ash and dye powders.

Following the directions on your package of soda ash, make a one gallon mixture of soda ash and water and set it aside.

Choose several colors of fiber reactive dyes and line them up in the order that you're going to use them. You can use ten different colors or you can repeat colors during the process.

Have your fabric ready. I used dry 100% cotton PFD fabric, but you can pre-wet it if you desire. There's no need to pre-soak it in soda ash since we will be adding soda ash as we add dye.

In the photo below you see the container that I used for my dyeing. It is a recycled ice cream container with a lid. The size stated on the container is 1½ gallons. You can use a container this size or larger. Keep in mind that the size and dimensions of your container may have an effect on your final results. A tall, narrow container will hold your fabric pieces differently than a short, wide container.



## Supplies

- 1½ gallon bucket, pail, container
- Container to mix one gallon of soda ash
- 10 half-yard pieces of prepared for dye fabric (PFD)
- Procion MX dyes or fiber reactive dye
- Soda Ash
- One cup measuring cup
- Mixing container, larger than one cup
- Teaspoon
- Rubber gloves
- Respirator

Measure one cup of the soda ash solution, that you set aside earlier, into your empty bucket. Place one piece of fabric in the bucket.

Measure one teaspoon of the first color of dye powder you've chosen to work with and place it in the mixing container with two or three tablespoons of the soda ash/water mixture. Stir to dissolve the dye powder and

then add more of the soda ash solution to make one cup of dye.

Pour this dye mixture over your fabric in the bucket. You can press the fabric a bit with your hand, but don't squish it too much. If you stir or move the fabric too much you may end up with muddy colors.

Add the next piece of fabric and follow that with the next dye color/soda ash mixture. Continue adding a layer of fabric, followed by a layer of dye color until you have all the fabric and dye layers in the bucket. I added a last cup of soda ash solution over the last piece of fabric and dye. You will probably have some leftover soda ash solution. You can store this for your next dyeing session.

Cover the bucket or put a lid on the bucket and let it sit overnight. The next day, rinse and wash the fabrics as you normally do when dyeing fabric.

Now that you know the basic steps to create fabulous looking fabrics, you should know that there are ways that you can vary your results. As mentioned earlier the container size may contribute to your results. If your fabric is much more squished into a narrow container you will probably see more mottling and color variation rather than if the fabric fits much more loosely in the container.

You can mix more dye powder per cup of soda ash solution for darker colors and less dye powder for lighter colors.

In my fabric examples, I had some leftover dye solution that I was storing in my refrigerator. When I mixed this dye solution I originally mixed it as a concentrate, which means it was mixed very dark with a lot of dye powder. Also when I mix and store these concentrates there is no soda ash solution mixed with it. If there had been, I wouldn't have been able to store it in the refrigerator for very long before it lost its power to color fabric.

When I used my leftover dye concentrates, I simply poured some of the concentrate into my measuring cup and then filled the rest of the measuring cup with soda ash solution. The amount of concentrate I used varied as I don't usually try to be scientific about my measurements when I dye, but I didn't use more than half a cup of dye concentrate because you need soda ash solution for the dye to react with the fabric.

If you are new to the dyeing process using fiber reactive dyes, I recommend learning the basics of dyeing before attempting this technique. There are many online sources available that teach the basics, as well as many great books on the subject. Here are a few suggestions:

### Online sources

Paula Burch's All About Hand Dyeing:  
<http://www.pburch.net/dyeing.shtml>

Melody Johnson:  
<http://www.lazydyer.blogspot.com/>

ProChem Low Water Immersion Dyeing:  
[http://www.prochemical.com/directions/MX\\_LowWaterImmersion.htm](http://www.prochemical.com/directions/MX_LowWaterImmersion.htm)

Dharma Trading:  
<http://www.dharmatrading.com/info/>

### Books

*Fast, Fun & Easy Fabric Dyeing: Create Colorful Fabric for Quilts, Crafts & Wearables* by Lynn Koolish  
ISBN-10: 157120508X

*Fabric Dyeing for Beginners* by Vimala McClure  
ISBN-10: 1574328131

*Dyes & Paints: A Hands-On Guide to Coloring Fabric*  
by Elin Noble  
ISBN-10: 0972825207

*Color by Accident: Low-Water Immersion Dyeing* by Ann Johnston  
ISBN-10: 0965677605