



# Hand Dyeing

with Laura Kemshall

Hand dyeing fabrics is easier than you might think. Today we're going to use a low water immersion technique to enable the creation of gorgeous visual texture and organic patterning on the cloth.

## Health and Safety

When working with dyes observe all usual health and safety precautions. Wear protective clothing at all times and wear a mask when mixing dye powders. Work in a safe way and clean up splashes and spills immediately. Store dyes and solutions in thoroughly labelled containers and keep away from pets and children. Read all guidelines that come with the dyes that you are using. Note that specific product instructions supersede the general guidelines given here. Tools and equipment used for dyeing processes must be kept purely for that purpose and cannot be used for culinary purposes afterwards.

## What you'll need:

- Procion MX dye in colours to suit
- Soda (soda ash or washing soda or swimming pool soda - please note required quantities are drastically different)
- Plastic container for mixing dye
- Spoons
- Container for soda solution
- Scales
- Measuring jug
- Plastic tubs/trays for dyeing
- Fabric
- Protective clothing (gloves, apron, mask)

## Recipes

Dye recipes vary, here's what works for us:

**Dye solution** - 1 heaped teaspoon dye mixed with approx 250ml warm water. Mix dyes with care. In a plastic container pop a little warm water and then add dye powder, mix to a paste and then top up with more warm water. Mix thoroughly, allow to stand and then mix again to ensure all dye powder is dissolved.

**Soda solution** - 9 tablespoons soda ash (or swimming pool soda) dissolved in approx 3.5 litres of water OR 600g washing soda dissolved in 3 litres of hot water.

**Salt** - Add salt if you want to. We add up to approx. 100g per litre of water and simply add it to the soda solution.

Soda and soda/salt solution can be stored indefinitely in a clearly labelled sealed container. Dye solutions are best used immediately (at least on the same day) but leftovers can be kept for another session. We try not to keep dye solutions for any longer than one week. If you have to save dye solutions for another day store them in a lidded container - a jam jar for instance, clearly labelled. Rather than keeping dye solution try to use it all up during the same session, just get plenty of fabric ready for dyeing!



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If you have any dye leftovers that have been kept for a while then don't throw them away. Old dye solutions, while no longer reactive enough for fabric dyeing still make an excellent substitute for inks. Use them to paint pages in your sketchbook or for colouring papers with rich vibrant colour for collage.

## What to do

Wash your fabrics to remove any size or finish with a hot wash, don't use softener it can inhibit the dye.

For large pieces I use a shallow tray. My fabric is cut to metre pieces and folded in half. I gradually pleat the fabric into the tray. Add one or more pieces until the tray is packed fairly closely with the first layer of fabric.

Pour on enough soda solution to saturate the fabric. Press with a gloved hand to ensure that the soda solution has penetrated the cloth right into the centre of the crumpled bundles.

Carefully pour on a little dye solution. Your fabric doesn't need to be swimming in dye, just enough to thoroughly colour the fibres. Press with a gloved hand and peep underneath the corner of the bundles to check that there aren't any white or pale bits. Add more dye solution if necessary.

Repeat to add another layer of fabrics if required until the container is full.

For small pieces I use an old sandwich tub or similar. My fabric is cut to about 20" square. Carefully scrunch the fabric evenly into rosettes. Place each scrunched fabric in the tub so that the bottom of the container is covered with a single layer of 'roses'. Apply soda solution and dye as before. Repeat to add more fabric to the tub if required.

Leave for a minimum of one hour (better still overnight) then rinse thoroughly in cold water to remove any loose dye. Keep your gloves and apron on for this!

Wash with detergent and softener. We tend to iron our fabrics dry from slightly damp to ensure a smooth wrinkle-free finish. Fold up neatly and admire the new additions to your stash!!