

# In the Thick of It

with Laura

Procion MX fibre reactive dyes can be used for vat dyeing and low water immersion dyeing techniques but can also be thickened for use in painting and printmaking processes. You've seen the video, now here's a quick recap of what to do...

## Preparing Stock Print Paste

I like to use a sodium alginate thickener called Manutex, but you might find a similar product available under other brand names. Manutex is a seaweed extract and as such is safe and simple to use. I make a batch of stock paste to which I later add dyes. I start with a tub or bowl of water (don't forget, any utensils and containers used for any dyeing process cannot ever be used for food use again), and sprinkle granules of Manutex into it whilst stirring briskly to avoid lumps. Judge for yourself how much Manutex to add, we're aiming for a thick paste. I've popped about 4 heaped spoonfuls into about 500ml of water but this is a natural product and results will vary. If your paste turns out too thick you can add more water, if your paste is too runny you can stir in more granules. Leave the paste for several hours or overnight to thicken up and for any lumps that may have formed to dissolve. Stir again before use.

Stock print paste can be made ahead of time and stored in a sealed, carefully labelled container in a cool place for several weeks. As with all art and craft activities, keep everything out of reach of children and pets who might mistake the paste for something edible.

## Preparing Fabrics

Procion MX dyes are used to colour cellulose fibres so this process is suitable for cotton, linen and viscose fabrics. Soda is required to be present in order to alter the alkalinity of the liquid in the dye paste and cause the dye to bond with the fabric. The most effective way to introduce soda is to add it to the fabric before printing or painting. This is easily done by pre-soaking the fabric in a soda solution.

Prepare a bucket of soda solution. You can use either soda ash or washing soda\*, but please note that the quantities required are vastly different. It is important to always wear an apron and gloves when working with soda ash or washing soda. Place your dry, pre-washed fabric into the soda solution and leave to soak for about 20 minutes. When thoroughly saturated carefully squeeze out any excess solution and then hang up your fabric to drip dry. Place plastic cat litter trays beneath the fabrics so that any drips are collected. Be sure to keep children and pets away from the drying fabrics. Any left over solution can be stored for future use. When the fabrics are dry they can be stored indefinitely in a plastic bag stored in a dry place. If you do store the

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fabric for another day be sure to label the bag so that you know it is soda soaked and always wear gloves when handling the fabrics. An additional note of caution, do not tear soda soaked fabrics as this will release soda into the air as a fine dust that could easily be inhaled. Instead tear fabrics to a workable size prior to soda soaking, or cut soaked fabrics with scissors or a rotary cutter and ruler when dry. If your soda soaked fabrics are crumpled then you can iron them when dry, but don't use steam!

Tip: You can print and paint onto soda soaked fabric while it is still damp (not wet). This will help to maintain the moisture levels required for the dyes to react with the fibres, particularly if you live in a hot and dry climate.

Manutex (sodium alginate) and Soda Ash are readily available from dyestuff suppliers. Washing soda is available at most supermarkets.

\* I have used washing soda with success for many years, but be sure to purchase a brand that does not contain any bleaching agents or brighteners - these are counter productive when dyeing!

## Soda Solution Recipes

### Soda Ash

9 tablespoons soda ash dissolved in approximately 3.5 litres of water. Refer to individual manufacturer's guidelines.

### Washing Soda

600g washing soda dissolved in approximately 3 litres of water.

Prepare lots of fabric because once you start printing you won't want to stop!!

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