

A Basic Guide to Low Water Immersion Dying

By Laurie Johnson

This is an instructional guide intended to outline how I dye 1 piece of fabric. Because I dye for fun, I am very inconsistent with my methods. Please know that there are as many ways to dye as there are dyers. Experiment and have fun!

Equipment needed:

Note: Any utensils used for dying should forever be kept away from food.

- Dust mask or respirator (only needed while mixing powdered dye)
- Measuring utensils (cups, tablespoons, teaspoons, plastic knives, spoons, etc.)
- Buckets, bowls, cups, plastic containers, pitchers, funnels, zip-loc baggies, and more. Find what works. Just keep it away from the kitchen once you start using it for dying.
- Stirring utensils: chopsticks, pastry brushes, spoons, etc.
- Pointy tipped squeeze bottles, empty water bottles, cups, or whatever else you might want to put the mixed dye into.
- Rubber gloves

Supplies needed:

- Soda Ash
- 100% Cotton fabric, t-shirts, clothing blanks, etc.
- Fiber Reactive Dyes (start with the Primaries: Lemon Yellow, Fuschia, and Turquoise)
- Salt, non-iodized (optional)

PREP YOUR FABRIC

Mix the soda ash solution. In a 5 gallon bucket (or any container that works for you), mix ½ cup soda ash per 1 gallon of hot water. Stir with a spoon or gloved hand until soda ash is fully dissolved. This solution keeps for as long as you need it. Just put a lid on it and store it with your dye supplies. I usually mix a half gallon at a time or so.

Cut your fabric into your desired size. I usually dye pieces as small as 9 inch squares up to multiple yards at a time. A fat quarter is a good size to start with.

Place your cut fabric into the soda ash bath. Let sit until thoroughly soaked. Squeeze out excess soda ash water. You can spin it out in a washing machine or a salad spinner, if you like. You can use the soda ash water until it is fully spent, storing it for your next use.

PREP THE DYE

Note: Procion dye is non-toxic, but it is a fine powder. Inhaling any fine powder is dangerous. ALWAYS WEAR A MASK WHEN HANDLING DRY DYE. This is non-negotiable. Once the dyes are fully mixed, the mask is no longer needed.

Mix the dye in a cup. I use about 1-3 tsp of dye powder per cup of water. More if you're dying a dark color, less if you're dying a light color. Fuschia is very strong, it needs less dye. Place the dye in the cup and add about a tsp of water (and a little salt if you are using). Using a chopstick or some other utensil, stir thoroughly. When you have a smooth paste, add water gradually until you have a cup of dye. Pour the dye into your dye holding container. I typically use a squeeze bottle with a pointy tip.

CHOOSE A CONTAINER

Find a container that is just small enough that if you scrunch up your fabric, it fits nicely in the container. You want to keep the scrunchy-ness when you dye it. Scrunch, fold or twist your fabric, and have it ready.

DYE THE FABRIC

Often, I like to use 2 colors of dye. I squeeze just enough dye into the container to cover the bottom. Then I place the scrunched up fabric in the container and let it start to wick upward. Then I pour another color of dye over the top of it. Just enough to pretty much cover it. At this point, you have to decide how much you want to manipulate the fabric. Not enough manipulation will cause there to be a lot of undyed areas. Too much, and it turns out more evenly colored. You get to decide what you are going for. I tend to not mix too much, but I don't like to have a lot of white areas on the fabric. So I will push and squeeze the fabric a bit.

Let it sit in the dye bath for at least 15 minutes. After an hour or two, the dye is pretty much fully spent. I like to put it outside in the hot sun if it is summertime.

THE RINSING:

Now comes the hard part. The excess dye needs to be washed out of the fabric. There will be a LOT of excess dye.

Start with a small basin of cold water and rinse for a few minutes. Rinsing with cold water first will help to wash out the soda ash. Change out the water once or twice. Now fill the basin with hot water. As hot as you can get. Let the fabric sit in the hot water until the water is cold. You may want to boil some water and pour that into the rinse water. After doing this a couple of times, (hopefully) all of the dye will be washed out at this point.

Dry the fabric in the dryer, or if you are impatient like me, just squeeze it and dry it with an iron.

ENJOY YOUR FABRIC.

I love my hand dyed fabric and give it love and hugs frequently.