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Why Learn to Dye?

Learning to dye fiber opens the door to an exciting new realm of color possibilities. Whether you knit, crochet, spin, weave, or felt, the greatest benefit of dyeing your own fiber is an unlimited range of color. The freedom of color choice in any fibers you wish to use presents a vast world of options.

My work with color in the dye pot began over a decade ago. I am fortunate to live on a 220-acre sheep farm in the Berkshire foothills of western Massachusetts. My flock provides an abundance of raw materials, and the ever-changing natural beauty of the pastoral landscape provides color inspiration.

Working with color on fiber is mesmerizing and addictive. This book will help you embark on your own color journey.



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The Art and Alchemy of the Dyepot

Hand-dyeing is part art and part science. A dyer understands not only the use of color but also the process of creating color and pairing hues to create harmonious palettes. The art of dyeing requires a basic understanding of the chemical interaction of dye materials with fibers. A grasp of basic color principles also helps in the beginning.

Although you could spend years studying the complex chemistry that takes place in the dyeing process, by learning a few basic principles you can very quickly be on your way to achieving satisfying results in hand-dyed yarn and fiber.

This book introduces the basic technical information for using acid and fiber-reactive dyes on animal and plant fibers. Dyeing fibers is not hard, but it is important to understand how dyes work in order to use them safely and successfully.

I present a number of techniques for achieving different effects. Some methods involve preparing dye baths in large pots and submersing the fibers in them. Others involve various ways of directly applying color to the fiber to create a pattern.

I also present two different approaches to dyeing. If you are a systematic person who wants consistent, repeatable results, you will probably prefer the methods that require following formulas and using careful measurements. If you prefer spontaneity and a more freehand approach, you will enjoy the freestyle techniques. Either way, there is no right or wrong. Dyeing is fun, so just jump in and get started. The more you work with colors, the more comfortable you will become with the steps in the dye process.



Creativity drives all fiber artists. Knitters, spinners, felt makers, weavers, rug hookers—we all pursue our crafts for the joy that comes from creating something that is personal, unique, and one-of-a-kind. Color is central to design in any fiber project. Hand-dyeing gives you the freedom to create colorways in your own personal aesthetic. The added bonus is getting to work with fibers and yarns of your own choice.



Color Possibilities

Knitters are drawn by the magic of creating intricate designs one stitch at a time by working one continuous strand of yarn. Whether you are knitting a pair of socks or a cabled sweater, the ability to choose any yarn and dye it any color greatly expands your design options.

For hand-spinners, the range of choices becomes more exciting when you dye your own fibers for crafting yarn. There are many ways to achieve color effects in spinning.



Weaving with hand-dyed yarn pushes the creative envelope further. Weavers can work magic by creating bold or subtle color effects at the loom. Hand-painted warps create exciting ikat-like stripes in scarves and runners. Semisolid yarns add depth and texture to clasped-weft designs.



Fiber, Fiber Everywhere

The explosion of interest in fiber arts over the past decade has made a vast difference in the number of resources available to fiber artists. Classes, supplies, books, publications, websites, and support networks make it easier than ever to explore the craft of hand-dyeing. A quick surf of the Internet reveals a wide range of sources for dye materials. A few clicks of a mouse bring everything you need—dyes, dye assists, and all necessary paraphernalia—right to your door. (See the appendix for a list of online sources for dyeing supplies.)

The same holds true for procuring the raw materials for the dyer's craft—undyed fibers. With the fiber art surge, a class of online e-tailers has emerged, providing numerous sources of yarn, roving, and unprocessed fibers. Wool is available from just about every corner of the globe, from sheep of every imaginable breed. The variety of undyed yarn ranges from goat to yak to possum and everything in between. Plant fibers run the gamut from cotton to banana to bamboo. A relatively recent class of "green" fibers is now available for the organically inclined dyer. The appendix provides a list of online fiber suppliers.

Fiber festivals and local yarn stores bring the raw materials closer to home for many dyers. Purchasing fiber is a tactile experience, and hands-on shopping is the fastest way to determine your personal preferences. Buying fiber directly from a fiber farm enhances the special, unique quality of hand-crafted projects. It also supports the efforts of small-scale fiber producers and farm viability. (See the appendix for a listing of annual fiber shows and festivals.)

Opportunities for instruction, inspiration, and technical support in dyeing are everywhere. Major fiber-art print publications frequently include articles about hand-dyeing. Classes in dyeing are offered at many yarn stores and craft schools. A multitude of groups and websites are dedicated specifically to the topic of dyeing fiber. (See the appendix for a list of craft schools and online resources for instruction and support.)

One of the joys of dyeing is that you can start with some easy and basic techniques to familiarize yourself with the process and then quickly branch out. You will need a few basic tools, but you don't need a fancy dye studio to get started.



The joy of dyeing comes from having an unlimited color palette and the ability to create a wide range of effects with color on fiber. Hand-dyed yarns have subtleties and variations that give them character and set them apart from commercially produced yarns. They are truly one-of-a-kind. Once I began dyeing my own fibers ten years ago, I never looked at commercial yarns in the same way.

Here is an overview of methods described in this book:

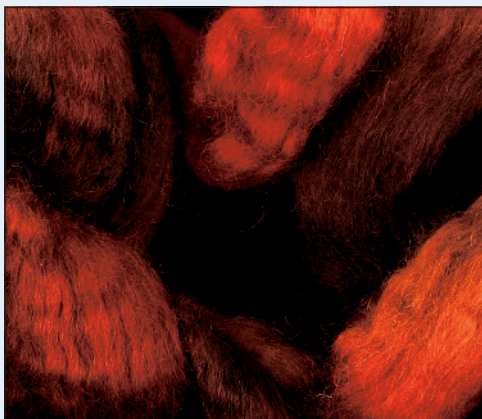
Solid-Shade Dyeing



Semisolid Shades



Hand-Paint Methods



Special Effects

