

Knotty Lady YARN S

How to Dye Yarn Part 1

With summer starting, we thought it was time to do another series. Don't worry...this one will be shorter...only 3 or 4 parts. With the nicer weather, we want to open our windows and air out our homes. As we do, we notice all the dust and clutter and the spring cleaning bug hits! As crafters, we sometimes tend to have a hard time throwing things away because we can always think of a way to repurpose it or recycle it in some way. I know I am guilty of this habit. This also includes going through our beloved yarn stashes. As we sort thru our stash, there are always so many projects that come to mind that we want to dive into. And then it sinks in.....where do we start? It also brings to mind the other crafts we have been wanting to try like felting, spinning, or maybe dyeing yarn!

The Knotty Lady Team may have put together a great selection of pre-dyed yarns with countless colorways to pick from. But you just can't seem to find the exact color you want for that one show stopping piece! In this series, we will explore the world of dyeing yarn and the many methods and tricks.

So what kind of yarn can you dye? Well, any yarn can be dyed. But, in order to achieve that perfect color, we have to note the fiber content of the yarn you want to dye. The first step in the process is to pair your fiber content with the type of dye needed. There are several types of dyes. The ones we will cover in this series are acid, natural, and unique dyes.



Animal/protein fibers like sheep, alpaca, and mohair you use an acid dye. Don't be scared of the word acid. We are just using some white vinegar.



Plant fibers like cotton, linen, and hemp you use a fiber reactive dye.



Synthetic materials like nylon and polyester need a different specific dye.

At Knotty Lady, we recommend Jacquard dyes for their ease of use. Jacquard has all three types of dyes and many color options. When working with the dyes, there is some homework to do prior to dyeing your yarn. For example, when dyeing an animal fiber with an acid dye, you will have to premix the acid dye powder and water to a specific ratio.

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This is not as applicable to the fiber reactive dyes or the iDye poly. Some dyers will give you specific measurements in either the diluted solution or measure straight from the container.

Now, let's figure out the basic supplies that we will need besides your yarn and dye color. Most of the following supplies will be needed with any dyeing method you choose. However, there may be more or fewer supplies needed depending on the fiber you wish to dye and the type of dye you pick.

Here's your basic supply list:

An old pot, roasting pan, or glass casserole dish

Gloves

Dust mask

Plastic measuring cups and spoons (for measuring dye)

Chopsticks or wooden spoon (for gently moving your yarn)

White vinegar (also known as acetic acid for acid dyes)

Plastic wrap

Squirt bottles/cups

Songes

A heat source (hot plate, stove or microwave).

This may sound like the supplies we find in our own kitchens. But I want to make clear that once you use these supplies for dyeing yarn it is no longer safe to use for food. This wouldn't be a bad time to hit up the local dollar or thrift store for inexpensive supplies if you are a beginner.

I want to note here, in all the research in preparing for this article, I want to say there are so many ways to dye yarn at home. Thus, making this a great trial and error craft to find what works the best for you. To start dyeing from home, you will need a fair amount of dye specific materials. You will also need to decide on the dye method appropriate for your yarn, so that you can prep your dyes.



Some dyeing techniques can be solid, semi-solid/tonal, gradient/ombre, variegated/multi, speckled, and self-stripping. How to accomplish each technique many vary. Here is a basic outline of how yarn is dyed.

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Pre-soak - this is where you soak the yarn for a minimum of 20 minutes. This step can also be paired with a mordant, or a solution to help fix the dye to the yarn. Some common ones are white vinegar for an acid dye on animal/protein fibers or Soda Ash (commonly known as baking soda) for plant-based fibers. The mordant can vary or can sometimes come later in the process.

Dye prep - this is where you prep the amount of dye needed for your yarn on hand. This includes dissolving and pouring the dye in the appropriate applying containers.

Applying the Dye - this can be as simple or complex as you wish it to be. This is the most creative step where we finally get to make our vision a reality. Depending on the technique you are going for depends on how to apply the color(s).

Fixating the Dye - bring on the heat. In some form or fashion, the yarn has to be heated up to absorb all the dye. This can be accomplished in the kettle pot method, where we simmer the yarn, dye in water for a period of time. Another method is to wrap our yarn in plastic wrap and microwave gentle for a few minutes. Crockpots are also a great way to add low heat. Lastly, put in a warm place for upwards of 24 hours.

Rinse and Dry - the only goal in the rinsing process is to remove all the dye that wasn't absorbed in the yarn before we dry. This limits the color run off at a later time and is often done with cold water so that the fibers "shrink" or return to normal after all the warm water. We also want the yarn to dry completely, for at least a day or more, before we start to work with it.

The concept of dyeing yarn is simple. Yet like most things we crafters are involved in, the execution is where we get well crafty. There are so many ways this can all be accomplished and we may see a video and tweak that to suit us and our needs better. At least we have a good base knowledge and have a better understanding of this next adventure before we take off and get started.