



# *How to Alter the Color of Wool Change the Color without Dyes*

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*Many Thanks and Happy Hooking!*

## How to Alter the Color of Wool

### **Change the Color without Dyes**

Many rug hookers, especially new rug hookers, do not want to invest additional money and time in supplies and dyes for overdyeing woolens to use in their hooking. This section explains some simple, inexpensive ways that you can alter the colors of wool without the use of commercial dyes and formulas. The tools are similar to what is used in overdyeing, but most are found right in your kitchen already.

Wool comes in glorious colors, and some not so glorious colors! Don't ever pass up a good piece of wool just because you don't like the color. You want to constantly be building your stash of wool, and in time you may want to start overdyeing them to achieve exactly the colors you need for a project. In the meantime, there are ways to change those ugly or not-quite-right woolens to get the colors you need for your hooking projects.

### Prep Steps for All Methods

#### 1. Gather Equipment

**IMPORTANT CAUTION:** *Only use these tools for wool -- do not use them ever again for food preparation.*

- Pot: enamel (no chips inside) or stainless steel
- Wool
- Tongs for Lifting Wet Wool
- Rubber Gloves
- White Paper Towels
- Uniodized Table Salt
- White Household Vinegar
- Protective Covering for Yourself & Your Work Surface
- Powder Tide or Powder Borax
- Wetting agent such as Jet Dry for dishwashers



#### 2. Select and Soak Wool

- a) Use from 1/2 to 1 yard total of wools, depending upon size of dye pot used. (I can dye 1 to 1 1/2 yards in my 20-qt. stainless steel pot.)
- b) You can use a variety of wools for these methods. Read about each method first and select the one that most closely matches what you'd like to do with your wool. Use wool that works well for hooking - these methods don't correct for poor weight or wrong fabric content.
- c) In your sink, fill a pot or tub with hot water, add about 3 Tbls. Jet Dry. (Don't pre-soak wool if you are marbling.)
- d) Add the wool to the pot. Squeeze water through each piece of wool to thoroughly wet it.
- e) Allow to soak for 15 to 30 minutes (longer is better.)



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### 3. Prepare the Wool Pot

a) Select a pot and fill it about 2/3 full of tap water.

*\*(For marbling, use just enough water to cover the wool.)*

b) Add a Tablespoon of Tide or Borax and stir to dissolve well.

c) Put the pot on the stove & allow it to come to temperature; bring the water just to the boiling point, then turn down to a simmer before you add the wool to the pot.

d) Go to the Method you wish to try.



*Just a note here about my favorite pots shown in the photos -I use an old enamelware pot to soak my wool (black one), and I use both stainless steel and enamelware to dye in. My enamelware pot is an old slop pot I bought at an antique shop (don't pay over \$20.00 for these -- not worth more than that). I like it because it has a lid and a sturdy bail handle. My larger pot is a 20 quart stainless steel pot, and I love it too because I can dye a lot of wool at one time in it.*

### **Method 1: Marry the Wool**

Example of when to use this method: If you have several red (or other color) pieces of wool and you need more than one red (or the other color) for a project, but the wools you have just don't look good together, you can marry them and bring those shades closer together!

You can also use this method to tone down bright colors, using wool in the complementary color (stay with me - it's easy.) For example, if you have a bright blue that you want to tone down, marry it in a pot with a piece of orange wool (its complementary color on the color wheel)— the blue and orange will marry to yield two pieces of different colored, but complementary wools that will be less bright and usable for the same project. You might want to save a little "before" piece of each wool, and then add little pieces of the "after" wool so you can compare and see the changes.

If you are not sure about complementary colors, look for a color wheel online; complementary colors lie directly across the wheel from one another.

### Here's How to Do It:

1. Add all that pre-soaked wool to the prepared pot of water + detergent; do not wring the water from the wool. Use enough wool in the pot so that the wool can still move in the water - don't pack it in.
2. Push the wool to the bottom of the pot, without allowing any wool to poke above the water line.
3. Let the wool simmer for about 20 -30 minutes. The wools will each release a bit of their dye, then all the dye colors in the solution blend together, so that the fabrics will become new shades that go well together.
4. When a decent amount of dye is released into the water (or after at least 20 minutes in the pot) set those dyes back into the fabrics. Pour about 1/3 cup white vinegar into the pot, give it a stir, then let it all simmer for another 20-30 minutes.
5. Cool the wool, then rinse in clear water. See Final Steps for All Methods.
6. All those colors will now look much better when used together in your rug! Use whichever similar colors (yes, plaids and other textures, too) that need to be married for a project.

## **Method 2: Stew the Wool**

Example of when to use this method: If you have several pieces of different colored wool that you'd like to use in the same project, but the wools just don't look "right" together, you can stew them and try to bring their shades closer together! This method is similar to marrying, but you'll use it with different colors, not all the same color family.

As with marrying, you can also use this method to tone down bright colors, using equal amounts of wool in the complementary color.

### Here's How to Do It:

1. Add pre-soaked wool to the prepared pot of water + detergent; do not wring the water from the wool. Use enough wool in the pot so that the wool can still move in the water - don't pack it in.
2. Push the wool to the bottom of the pot, without allowing any wool to poke above the water line.
3. Let the wool simmer for about 20 -30 minutes. The wools will each release dyes, then all the dye colors in the solution blend together, so that the fabrics will become new shades that go better together.
4. When a decent amount of dye is released into the water (or after at least 20 minutes in the pot) set those dyes back into the fabrics. Pour about 1/3 cup white vinegar into the pot, give it a stir, then let it all simmer for another 20-30 minutes.
5. Cool the wool, then rinse in clear water. See Final Steps for All Methods.
6. All those colors will now look much better when used together in your rug! Use a variety of colors, plaids, checks, and shades that you'd like to use for a project. Some will work well, and others might not. It's an experiment

## **Method 3: Marble the Wool**

Thanks to Karen Kahle from *Primitive Spirit Rugs* for creating this great technique.

This technique is useful for creating different colors of wools to use in the same background or in the same rug, that are very well coordinated but not the same color.

### Here's How to Do It:

*Note: For this technique, use just enough water to barely cover the wool, and don't pre-soak the wool.*

1. Pick a dark wool, like hunter green, and then it's complement—medium to dark red or burgundy. Then pick a light shade of either of those (pink, light green), or pick a neutral, like camel or tan. Rip each piece into similar sizes.
2. Layer pieces one on top of the other, alternating the colors and tones (dark, light, dark, light, etc). Roll them together long ways, like a snake or a jelly roll. Take rubber bands or twine and bind the roll in several places (think tie dye.) The number of binding ties will vary the effect you get, but use at least five. You can also use twine or strips of wool for tying up the bundle.
3. Coil the roll of wool up like a snake and put it in the bottom of your prepared pot of water + detergent. You want the coil to just fit inside the pot, so if you are doing small swatches, use a smaller pot. Use just enough water to barely cover the wool.
4. Smoosh the wool down in the water with tongs to mix in the detergent and to wet the dry coil of wool.
5. Simmer wool coil for 30 minutes (do not boil the water or you will felt the wool—not good to do!). You can turn the coil over in the pot after about 15 minutes if you want—this is something to experiment with as it will vary your results.

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6. After 30 minutes, add about 1/2 cup of white vinegar to set the dyes back into the wool and let it all simmer for another 30 minutes, or until the water is clear and the dyes have all been taken up.
7. Rinse wool coil in cool water. When the wool is cool enough to touch, cut the ties or rubber bands and unwrap your wool and be amazed at the results!
8. Follow Final Steps for All Methods.

Here are some color combinations that work especially well for marbling:

- navy/soft yellow/golden brown
- olive/camel/maroon
- dark red/light red/black or dark plum
- russet brown/camel/eggplant
- blue/oatmeal/olive green
- blue/white/brown

As you can see these do not always follow the complement formula. Some great subtle effect can be achieved with a more monochromatic combination such as brown/camel/mustard -- especially good for backgrounds. Experiment with anything you think might look good together. You can do it with 3 small swatches in a small pan to get an idea of how it will turn out before you use large amounts to avoid unhappy surprises with larger pieces! Some wool will release more dye than others, so you'll have to experiment and see what you get . . . it's always a happy surprise!

### **Final Steps for All Methods**

#### 1) Cool the Wool

- a) Carefully move the pot from the stove to the sink. Wear protective gloves to prevent being burned.
- b) Slowly cool the wool by running first warm, then tepid, then cool water over the wool. Do not go immediately from hot bath to cold rinse or you could felt your wool, making it too thick for hooking. You can also just turn off the fire under the pot and allow the wool to cool in the pot overnight. I usually can't wait that long to see the wool!



#### 2) Rinse & Dry the Wool

- a) Remove each piece of wool from the cooled pot and lightly wring out excess water.
- b) I rinse & spin the wool in my washing machine -- just using the rinse cycle on cold.
- c) Put the wool into your dryer with a bath towel and a dryer sheet and allow to dry on medium heat. The bath towel will help fluff the wool fibers and the dryer sheet will prevent static cling to make folding and storing much nicer. It smells good, too!



#### 3) Enjoy Your "New" Wool!



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My website offers lots of great educational information, books, patterns, and my catalogs of designs for rug hooking and punch needle embroidery.

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