

Basics for Hand Overdyeing Wools for Rug Hooking

I have had so many rug hookers ask me about the process of hand-dyeing wools, that I thought it might be helpful to offer this illustrated example to show you what's needed & how to do some simple dye bath dying. Keep in mind that this is the way I do it, but there are many other methods and ideas you can try. I encourage you to take the plunge if you've never tried dyeing wool before -- it is not difficult and doesn't have to be expensive. Once you try it, I am sure you'll want to experiment with other methods for different results. These instructions will help you to visualize the process and get you started -- after that you should feel comfortable with the whole process and more at ease when trying other methods.



- Glass Jars
- Measuring Spoons 1/64 tsp to 1 tsp
- Glass Measuring Cups
- Tongs for Lifting Wet Wool
- Plastic Fork or Small Whisk
- Rubber Gloves
- White Paper Towels
- Uniodized Table Salt
- White Household Vinegar
- Protective Covering for Yourself & Your Work Surface

Step 1 - Gather Your Equipment

IMPORTANT CAUTION: Only use these tools for dyeing -- do not use again for food preparation.

- Dye Pot: enamel (without any chips inside) or stainless steel
- Acid-Reactive Dyes for Wool
- Dye Formulas (recipes)
- Wool
- Synthropol or wetting agent such as Jet Dry



My Dye Pots

Step 2 Select and Soak the Wool



1. Use from 1/2 to 1 yard 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.)
2. Select several different woolens to go into the dye bath. Using solids, plaids, textures, and a variety of colors will give you several wools that will work together. Your recipe should also tell you what colors of wool the recipe works best over. You'll find wool at your local thrift store if you want to recycled it, or check out Dorr Mill and Cushing for really nice ones. There are also lots of places on the web to find hand-dyed and off-the-bolt wool.
3. Fill a pot or tub with hot water, add Synthropol according to package directions, or use about 3 Tblsp Jet Dry.
4. Add the wool to the pot. Squeeze water through each piece of wool to wet it thoroughly.



1. Allow wool to soak for 15 to 30 minutes (longer is better.)
2. Select your favorite dye pot and fill it about 2/3 full of tap water.
3. Add a Tablespoon of uniodized salt, which helps the dye absorb evenly. If you want a mottled effect to your wool, omit the salt.
4. 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 dye and wool to the pot.
5. Just a note about my favorite pots -- I use an old enamelware pot to soak my wool, and I use both stainless steel and enamelware to dye. 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 pots are stainless steel and I love them because I can dye a lot of wool at one time -- they are 20-quart pots.

Step 3 - Prepare the Dye Bath



1. Select your favorite dye pot and fill it about 2/3 full of water.
2. Add a Tablespoon of uniodized salt, which helps the dye absorb evenly. If you want a mottled effect, omit the salt.
3. 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 dye and wool to the pot.
4. 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 stainless steel and I love it too because I can dye a lot of wool at one time in it -- it is 20 quarts.

Step 4 Prepare the Dye



1. Wear rubber gloves, and prepare the dye according to the manufacturer's directions. I use Cushing Acid dyes, ProChem dyes for wool, & Aljo dyes - they each have their own prep directions.
2. For most formulas, you'll add the measured dyes to one cup of boiling water (abbreviated as 1 CBW). Dye formulas can include three or more dyes to be mixed together in the boiling water. To prevent the dye colors from intermixing, stir your measuring spoon in a container of dry salt to remove left-over dye between measurements of each color.
3. Use a small whisk or a plastic fork to thoroughly mix the dry dye until it is completely dissolved.
4. When the dye bath is at a simmer, add the dye mixture to the pot and stir gently.

Step 5 - Dye the Wool



1. Add the pre-soaked wool to the dye bath (do not wring the water from the wool). Push the wool to the bottom of the pot, without allowing any wool to poke above the water line.
2. For primitive, mottled color, stir the wool gently only when it first goes into the pot. For more even color, stir when you add the wool, and several times throughout the dye process.
3. Cover the pot and leave it for 30 minutes.
4. Check the wool to see if it is the color intensity you want (it will be lighter when it is dry). If the color is right, add about 1/3 cup of white vinegar to the pot and stir thoroughly.
5. Cover the pot again and allow the vinegar to set the dye into the wool. Leave for 30 more minutes (I know some dyers only simmer with the vinegar for 15 minutes, but to be sure the wool is color fast, you should leave it for another 30 minutes.)

Step 6 - Cool the Wool



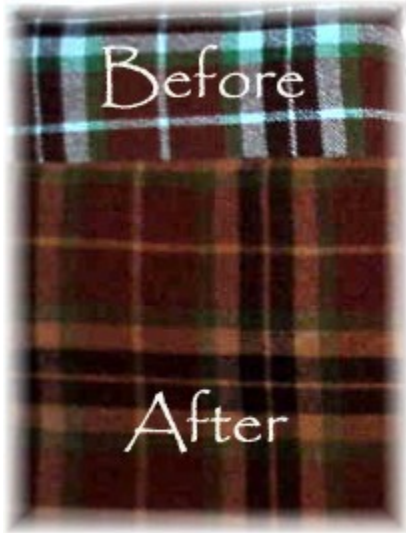
1. Carefully move the dye bath from the stove to the sink. Wear protective gloves to prevent being burned.
2. Slowly cool the wool by running first warm, then tepid, then cool water over the wool. Do not go immediately from hot bath to cold rinse or you could felt your wool, making it too thick for hooking.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

Step 7 - Rinse & Dry the Wool



1. Remove each piece of wool from the cooled dye pot and lightly wring out excess water.
2. I rinse & spin the wool in my washing machine -- just using the rinse cycle on cold.
3. Put the wool into your dryer with a bath towel and a softener sheet. Dry on medium heat. The bath towel will fluff the wool fibers and the softener sheet will prevent static to make folding and storing the wool much nicer.

Step 8 - Enjoy Your Dyed Wool



Open the dryer and be surprised at how beautiful your wool turned out! And then find some great storage solutions, because once you start, you won't be able to stop dyeing and collecting wool for rug hooking!

This photo shows a recycled piece of wool 'before' (which was a bit too bright for me) & 'after' overdyeing with a rich red-brown dye formula.