

DYEING SILK IN *the Microwave*

Today I am dyeing a 28"X 40" piece of 8mm silk fabric using a squeeze bottle and one color of fiber reactive dye powder. You will need a microwave and access to hot and cold running water. Choose your silk fabric or garment, a fiber reactive dye color and formula for mixing. Prepare your work table by covering it with a plastic drop cloth (if needed). Gather your supplies below. Once you use your dye tools for dyeing, do not use them again later for food.

Supplies: white distilled vinegar 5%; measuring spoons and cups; funnel; a one cup beaker and stir stick; squeeze bottle with Yorker spout; plain white paper towels; timer; dust mask; nitrile gloves; safety glasses; dish with lid for vinegar soak; dish or tray for applying dye; microwavable dish (glass pyrex is good).

- Prewash silk fabric to remove impurities (opt.)
- Put on nitrile gloves and safety glasses. Place clean and dry silk fabric into a dish with lid and add enough vinegar to submerge silk for soaking 10 minutes. Set a timer. You can fold and tie the silk into a pattern first if you want, or just scrunch it into the dish. (Leftover vinegar can be kept in the dish with lid for quite awhile and be reused many times.) Next the dye mixture, so **put on your dust mask.**
- Put 1/4 tsp. urea into a beaker and add 1/4 cup very warm to hot tap water. Stir until dissolved. Measure and add the recommended amount of dye powder to the urea solution while it is still very warm. Stir well.
- Test the color by putting a dot of dye solution on a paper towel. Adjust color to the hue you want. The colors will always appear much darker when wet than they will when dry.
- When you are happy with the color, use a funnel to pour your dye solution into a squeeze bottle that has a Yorker spout lid. Set it aside and prepare your dye dish. [You can remove the dust mask once you are sure no dye powder is still present.]

- Cover the bottom of the microwavable dish with a paper towel to collect excess dye.
- Get another dish or tray ready for applying dye by covering the bottom with a paper towel, or several, depending on the size of your dish or tray.
- When your silk is finished soaking, remove it from the vinegar and squeeze out excess (but do not rinse.) Place silk into the application dish or tray and scrunch it (unless you have already tied it into a pattern.) This will form high and low areas. Apply dye to silk using the squeeze bottle; turn silk over and dye the other side. A little dye goes a long way on silk.
- It is time to microwave. Place silk carefully in the microwavable dish you have prepared. The silk must be kept moist while “cooking”. We keep a spray bottle full of vinegar handy and use it to spray the silk if it dries out during the process. Cover silk with a lid that has a few holes or with just a paper towel or two sprayed with vinegar.
- Place dish in microwave and cook on high power for 75 seconds. Let it cool a bit and check silk. If it has dried, spray it with vinegar, cover again and microwave for another 75 seconds. This should be long enough; but if your silk is larger than ours, you can leave it in another 30 seconds or so. (For smaller silk, like an 8” x 72” scarf, 60 seconds 2x is sufficient.) Let the microwave dish cool awhile undisturbed until close to room temperature.
- Remove and rinse silk in cool running water until water is almost clear. Gradually increase water temperature until very warm. Fill your rinsed dish now with the very warm water and a drop or two of fabric detergent or mild dish soap. [We use Palmolive. It is mild on hands as well as the silk.] Gently squeeze out more unattached dye and continue rinsing with clear water until water is almost colorless.
- We roll our finished silk in a towel so it is just damp and perfect for pressing. Iron, using a silk setting; do not use steam. Spray with water if the silk becomes dry. Some artists like to leave their silk naturally wrinkled. We enjoy the dye pattern more when it is pressed.

- Next, we generally cut our silk fabric and sew it into whatever we are making for that day. Or if it is an item that has already been sewn, it is finished and ready to use or to wear!

The whole dyeing process from beginning to end takes about one hour 15 minutes. We like this method with silk because it yields the most vibrant hues. However, we only use pieces of 8mm silk under 36-45”x 60”. When yardage is greater, we find it doesn’t “cook” in the center and the dyes wash out in that area. But the process works great with smaller sizes; and there are plenty of those to dye!

Microwave temperatures can vary, so it could affect your results; adjust accordingly. Show caution because microwaved dishes and fabric can become very hot - let them cool before handling. Always supervise children if they are present.

NOTES

For using 2 or 3 dye colors, just repeat the steps for mixing the solution with each new color. Remember, the colors will mix and form other colors, so be sure those combinations will be what you would like. Typically we find it best to use not more than three different colors on one piece of silk.