

Woolly Wormhead

Oven Dyeing

Knowing that bus life won't afford us the luxuries of endless supplies of water or a microwave, I've been getting the art of dyeing fine tuned to cope without such things, and one of the best tools is the oven. Little water is needed, and it can be safely done whilst cooking the roast, making it economical on fuel.

These photos are of washed kid mohair being dyed, but you can dye roving and yarn too. Start as you would any other dye process and soak the fibres thoroughly first. A dab of vinegar helps in the soaking too.

I'm using cheapy roasting tins here - have seen folk use ceramic oven dishes, but they're no good to us as they are breakable, and bus life requires most things to be unbreakable. Using a metal tray doesn't burn (unless you forget and overcook) and won't rust if you use a non-stick tray.

These small trays I got in Woolworths (I think) and take about 100g of fibre comfortably. If your oven is bigger, use a bigger tray. I found that yarn likes a little more room and a slightly deeper tray, depending of course on the size of your skein.

Lay your fibres out in the tray evenly, and add enough cold water to fill about two thirds or three quarters of the way up. You could cover it completely, but you may be at risk of spillage and burns trying to move the tray around - just use your judgement regards how much fibre and water is needed. Too little water and the fibres might singe. A deeper tray will allow more space for water and dye movement, etc etc.



Add another decent dab of vinegar to the water before adding the dyes - you want the colour to be fully absorbed, so that no dye is wasted and rinsing is quick and painless. In the same vein, don't over do it when adding the dyes. For this one, I just sprinkled the powder on directly - the heat will encourage the dye to filter downwards keeping the mottled effect intended. With yarn I found that it preferred the dye in a solution.

To encourage the dyes to filter downwards, I gently press the fibres (and dye) down with a wooden spoon... not stirring, just pressing. Stirring would encourage the dyes to mix more, which may be an effect you're after. When I'm happy everything's ready, I cover the tray with foil and put it into the oven, on gas mark 4 (or 5 if I'm cooking something else) Think that's about 350°F/180°C.

After about 10 or 15 minutes, I check to see how it's all going, and if the fibres need to be pushed down again I reach for my wooden spoon. At this stage you can normally tell how the dyeing is going - gently lift a corner of the fibres/yarn, and if all's well you'll see the water at the bottom has taken on colour. If the water is still clear, encourage the dye to sink with your spoon again. It may be that you have over packed the dye bath, in which case some of the fibres might need dyeing again.

Back to the oven, and after a total of 20 minutes I take the fibres out and let them cool. 20 mins is the average time, occasionally they need longer but do remember to check to avoid over cooking. Let them cool naturally with or without the foil lid - I leave mine on for a slow cool but if I'm in a hurry I leave it open. A slow cool allows the fibres to absorb any remaining dye and naturally get back to a safe temperature.

Remember we're trying to avoid shocking those fibres!



When cool enough to handle, it's time for rinsing. Again, I use my judgement here and rinse at roughly the same temperature as the water in the tray. If the water is rinsing with colour, too much dye was added (or not enough heat or vinegar) so bear this in mind and remember for next time. Wasted dye not only costs you money but isn't good for the environment. If I find that there is excess dye to rinse, then I use hotter water (gradually getting cooler each rinse) and avoid stirring, to speed up the dye removal process. You'll find some colours, particularly those containing turquoise bleed more - experience tells me that extra vinegar is the key.



Once rinsed and water running clear, spread the fibres or hang the yarn for drying. I use those super handing drying racks, but a few old towels can be just as good. Just make sure air can circulate. I also re-use all the foil and roasting trays, being a good girl and keeping all my dye equipment for dyeing only. Because you use a lid when in the oven, there's no risk of spillage or splattering, so it's safe enough to do around your kitchen.

Typically, I can't find the photo of the yarn that this lot of fibre became, and it's long since been sold, but here's another one done in exactly the same way - I dye all my kid mohair and Wensleydale this way, and most of my rovings too. Unless you've got a catering oven, this method isn't ideal for batch dyeing. But it is handy to do whilst you are using the stove top or microwave, and ideal for just a quick dye job. It's another method after all.



These are the 'Easy Acid' dyes, available from either [Kemtex](#) or [Omega](#). I generally use regular acid dyes, which require more acetic acid (vinegar) and are stronger in colour, but highly recommend

these easy dyes for anyone new to the craft or for those who don't do a lot of dyeing.

A bit more about health & safety:-

1. You must use separate utensils, vessels etc for dyeing - do not use them for food once dye has come into contact with them.
2. If you dyeing in the oven, you will be covering your tray or pot, and so they are pretty safe - uncovered dye pots are another matter and should be some distance from food, to avoid splashing or spillages.
3. Microwave dyeing is also safe, unless you're too splash happy or leave the bag/container open.
4. I've got a small kitchen, and it will be even smaller in the bus, so have found ways of juggling space and time. But at the end of the day if you're not comfortable using your oven, then you don't have to :)

Contact:-

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