

A guide to... Plastic Bag dyeing

It can be very frustrating if you can't find the fabric you want in a shop or market. Dyeing your own fabrics allows you to create the exact colour you need, when you need it. So why not start 'plastic bag dyeing' your own fabrics at home?

What do I need?

- Plastic bags – good quality, strong, medium or large freezer bags (30cm x 40cm)
- Cotton or Calico – try to use the best fabric you can afford. Good quality dress-weight cotton is the easiest fabric to use for quilting and patchwork
- Salt solution (500g salt, make up to 2 litres with hot water, shake and leave to cool) and Soda solution (400g soda crystals, make up to 2 litres with hot water as with salt solution). You may like to use old lemonade bottles or buckets.
- Rubber gloves, old clothes, surface protector sheets
- Cat litter trays
- A large measuring jug or jar marked with the required amount
- Cling film
- Measuring spoons (to be used only for dyeing)
- Pure dye solutions

How do I prepare?

1. Put an open plastic bag into the cat litter tray. Put on your rubber gloves.
2. Make up your dye bath – into the bag put 5 desert spoons of pure dye solution, 100ml of soda solution, 100ml of salt solution, 500ml cold water. Mix the solution. It will only remain 'active' for 3-4 hours so put the fabric into the solution quickly.
3. Put your fabric into the mixed dye solution. If you want an all-over colour wet the fabric first. If you want a 'mottled' effect, put it in when dry.

What next?

4. Push the fabric down into the dye. Gently twist the bag at the top to close it. Keeping one hand on the twist, push the fabric into the dye again with your other hand from the outside of the bag.

5. Check for leaks in the bag by gently lifting the bag out of the tray. If you do spot a leak, take everything to a sink and transfer the dye and fabric to another bag.
6. Tie a knot in the bag to keep as much air out as possible.
7. Agitate the mixture for about five minutes to make sure the fabric is evenly dyed. Leave the bag with the top knot sticking up and make sure the bag is not bent over – if it bends over the dye solution seeps out.
8. Leave the bag for at least an hour, but preferably two hours, agitating from time to time depending on how evenly dyed you want the fabric.

What happens after that?

9. Wearing your gloves, carefully untie the knot and remove the fabric. Squeeze out as much of the solution as possible and wrap the fabric in some cling film.
10. Wash and rinse the fabric when you're ready. First rinse in cold water by hand. If you have more than one colour, wash them separately. Next wash the fabric in hot soapy water by hand. Rinse again in cold water until the water runs clear.
11. Leave the fabric to dry – this can be done outside but not in direct sunlight.
12. When dry, iron your fabric so it's ready to use in your next creative project!

Top tips:

- If you want a paler version of the fabric you have dyed, just re-use the same dye solution and add a new piece of fabric. Repeat all the steps in order. Just remember the dye only remains active for 3-4 hours.
- If you want a dark, strong colour leave your fabric in the dye solution for three to four hours or even overnight. The dye can be thrown away afterwards. Do not use this method if dyeing silk - the soda can ruin the silk fibres.

It's as easy as that! We hope you enjoy dyeing your fabrics at home.

From the team at the Quilt Museum & Gallery.

Health and Safety note: *If you live with other people or are under 18 please do ask permission or inform them before you start dyeing. Always wear protective gloves and old clothing and cover surfaces. It is advised that you wear protective glasses too. Thoroughly clean surfaces when finished and never use dying equipment for any other purpose.*