

A TUTORIAL ABOUT MAKING AND USING PAINT OVERDYE

by
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*These procedures are intended to be used
with the GW paint overdyes available on the website
in the Supplies section or to mix your own colors.*

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WHAT IS THE PAINT OVERDYE?

Paint overdye is simply a paint and water mixture that adds the effect similar to expectations of tea dye, but better and more under your control. Length of time in the mixture does not affect depth of color. It can also be a color (blue, green, etc.). You can order the paint overdye for aging fabric that I have developed from my website, or mix your own. Even if you do not want a grungy effect, new whites are far whiter than old whites were when new, so overdye is desirable as a means of simply taking the edge off of newness. Lots of people do not follow through with this step because they feel afraid or that it will be hard or that results might be bad. Better to stick with the devil you know (the white) than to try new (they say). Some say they prefer really white and brights, but I don't really believe it. I have encountered some resistance in all of my classes until they see it. Give it a try. It is quick and you can make adjustments even when the fabric is dry. It takes less time to just do it then it does to keep fretting about whether you should do it.

One of the qualities of using paint for dye is the control of the color (not always possible with regular dyes) and the other is that the paint adds a small amount of stiffness to the fabric which in doll scale can be very helpful to prevent or cutback on fraying on the edges, allowing the user to make nice crisp finger folds and easier to draw on patterns. I began to concoct all manner of aging fabrics to achieve the look I desired and started decades ago with the old tea dye (and coffee) method. This turned out to be expensive and not reliable for the quantities I needed for my business. Somewhere after trying tea, then Rit and other dyes, I came up with my wax antiquing so that I could control "placing" dirty and worn areas where they were most effective. But all along the bummer was the base color. Then one day I realized that the paint I got on all my clothes did not come out. Hmm. Simultaneously, I was asked to do a doll for Disney to look very old. When I turned in my first sample, the art director said - more grunge, more old and said do what they do on movie sets - throw a little paint around. And here we are. There is hardly a square inch of fabric that goes out of here in finished dolls and clothing that has not been paint overdye. It enabled the use of fine batistes, voiles, and lawns which have a very limited palette available to buy, none are colors that I like for my dolls, and I never ever use plain white. I even use it to age Santa wool beards, along with trims like laces and ribbons. When looking for a print, the scale might be right but I don't like the color's brightness or the white background - paint overdye to the rescue.

In this tutorial I will go over paint overdyeing for an aged effect (taking the starkness out of pure white) and how to use the same idea to dye a color. All paint dyeing only achieves a pastel (or tint) of a color no matter how deep the starting color of your paint. This is due to the overwhelming power of the white fabric. You can use an increasing ratio of paint to water, but at some point, the fabric will become too stiff. So better to aim for the lighter variations of any color when planning.

Note and Warning: The first thing to know is that every batch, no matter how carefully the paint and the water are measured, comes out different. That is a given and not much different than say a paint store or fabric or yarn dye lots. Who knows what all makes the subtle differences from one day to the next. The other is that even when you think you have a recipe that was perfect one time, it can be radically different on a different type of fabric, say batiste to muslin. So, the type of cloth is a second factor. Having said all that, it will come as no surprise when I caution, as we do here in my workshop every single time we paint overdye, to do test swatches first.



All of the fabrics on the doll above (including the body fabric) were paint overdye from bright whites. Undies and laces were aged overdye and the dress used colored paint to get the mustard.

WHAT PAINTS CAN BE USED?

You can use most any water based paint, although each brand can have aspects good or bad that other brands will not. We happen to use latex house paints because we use such a high volume of paint and I keep a range of mixing colors to work with to arrive at a particular color I am looking for. For most people, the small bottles of liquid acrylics will be just fine and there are hundreds of hues to choose from. Although it is possible to use acrylic tube paint, it is harder to mix it thoroughly with water. I sometimes will resort to a tube color in a pinch to tweak a color I am going for in a test batch but will then buy the equivalent color in liquid form. It is best to buy full bodied paints (higher pigment content which you want) over student quality.

THE BASIC RULES OF PAINT OVERDYE

- *Although it might occur to you to paint overdye already sewn items, it is very hard to achieve good results and so one rule is you should **only do this to flat uncut fabrics**. In fact the only already sewn items we use paint overdye on are stuffed items (mostly primitive animals), Cottons and silks work best.*
- Make sure to include trims that will go with any fabrics you are aging. It would look wrong to put white lace on aged undies fabric.
- If in doubt with new (or old) fabrics that seem to have a lot of sizing in them, or if your test swatch has uneven results, gently pre-wash fabric by hand using a mild soap.
- This is not like other dyes where length of time in dye bath will deepen color.
- Leftover paint and water overdye mix can be saved in a jar to use for more dye jobs. As long as there is enough mixture left for the size fabric, it is usable. It can smell bad, but still be usable.
- **NEVER SPEED UP DRYING USING HEAT** - this will yield uneven and undesirable results.

MIXING HINTS:

- (1) *If you mix up your paint overdye in the water and let it sit for a few hours - you will get much better results than if you do it totally fresh, although if you mix very very well, you can do it immediately.*
- (2) *Paint overdye **must be mixed with a brush** - no sticks or spoons or even shaking a container - only the bristles thoroughly mix the paint and the water. Keep brush handy for frequent stirrings, always swabbing the bottom of the container as paint settles fast. Make sure to swab out every bit of the paint from the original container, measuring cup or spoon (use the brush to do this) so you get the full measure of paint.*
- (3) *If you end up with blobby areas, it is fine, you can redo easily, but it means you did not mix well and you must use a brush to mix with.*
- (4) *Adding more water will make results lighter; adding more paint to same water will yield a darker color. This is why you want to do a test swatch (a 2" square of fabric is good). See "CORRECTIONS" below for if you think you made a mistake.*
- (5) *In doing test dyes, keep in mind that wet things look more than twice as dark as dry.*

PAINT TO WATER RATIOS:

HINT: *Best to only overdye ½ - 1 yard of fabric at a time to avoid uneven places. Even in our workshop, we only overdye maximum pieces of 1 yard at a time.*

THE STARTING PLACE (or for lighter overdye or aging):

- Use 1 tablespoon paint to $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 cup water. This would be for a small piece of lightweight fabric (up to ½ yard).
- For dyeing 1 yard pieces at a time, double recipe to 2 tablespoons of paint to 1 ½ - 2 cups of water.

FOR DARKER OVERDYE - Simply add more paint.

FOR LARGER AMOUNTS OF FABRIC - If possible, divide your total fabric into yard pieces (give or take). For a few yards worth, you might use a quart of water in a gallon size basin. Keep track of your recipes and additions of water or paint to be able to replicate if desired.

THINGS YOU WILL NEED TO PAINT OVERDYE:

- You will need a container to do the dyeing in. For a small batch for say undies fabric for a single doll, use a container with a large opening to work in like a bowl that has a quart capacity, even though you won't use that much water but you do need the open working area. Obviously, if you will be making a large batch you may need a small basin that might hold a gallon or two.
- A 1" wide flat brush (I keep a cheap pastry brush or this job) for the constant mixing and to swab out all of the paint from whatever you measured it in.
- The paint you will use - more on types of paint and mixing your own colors will follow.
- Water.
- An old towel.
- Swatches (about 3-4" square) of the fabric you will be using. See section on types of fabric that work well.
- Rubber gloves are optional but if you wash your hands right after, no real need.

THE PROCEDURE:

Once you have gathered your materials, it should only be about 20 minutes to do this with drying time taking not more than another half hour depending on humidity.

- (1) Use your brush to swab out the measured amount of paint so you get it all into the water.
- (2) Before putting fabric into paint overdyer mix, always use brush, scooping along the bottom doing a thorough pre-mix, even if you did this recently.
- (2) Dip dry fabric (wet will take less color) to be overdyed into mix and **squish around** into the fabric *really* well. Keep scrunching it until it is evenly wet, then hold up over container to see if there are any blob spots and if so, work into the fabric with a scrubbing action like doing handwashing. Redip and scrunch until it seems even. Then squeeze out all excess water in your hands (don't wring, just squeeze) until it is not dripping. If too dark, dip in clear water and squeeze out again. This mix will make the fabric a bit "crispy" when dry, but not unworkably so - in fact one plus is that the fabric will ravel less on the raw edges. It can be ironed once dry. It is permanent and fairly colorfast, as opposed to many other forms of dye. This mixture may be kept and reused several times - so make sure to squeeze out the excess into the dye bath. **Do not use on already sewn up doll clothes.** You should also do the same for any lace, strings or ribbons such as those for drawstring ties and any other fabrics that may be too new looking, bright or have too much light/dark contrast in the print.
- (3) Once you have squeezed out most of the water (so it is now just really "damp" and not dripping) smooth with hands on an old towel and let dry flat - any creases cause irregular drying that can be undesirable, so try to keep it flat. Let it air dry, **do not speed up drying** with any heat. It will dry very quickly - unless it is humid, it is often ready to use in 20 minutes. You can hang it to dry if you are ready to turn it 90 degrees a few times every few minutes, because if you don't, the sheeting action of water leaves the color behind and in high spots making it very uneven. Do not drape it as I did my first trial over the side of the bathtub as it left a wonderful stripe there (the high spot) when dry. Keep your lace as flat as possible too.
- (4) Once dry, iron fabric(s) and trims to ready them for cutting and sewing.
- (5) Save any leftover mix to use again.

CORRECTIONS TO MAKE IF NECESSARY and HANDLING PAINT OVERDYED FABRIC:

- If, as it is drying, you see that you got it too dark or there are big irregularities you don't like, simply take it to the sink as soon as possible (the longer you wait, the more permanent it gets, but some color can even be removed when fabric is dry if freshly dry), and with a bit of dish soap and water, give it a mild scrub. Rinse and try again, using more water to paint if you had it too dark. If it was too light, you will need more paint per water amount to achieve, (longer soaking in the mixture does not help).
- If your fabric seems too stiff when dry, work it by stretching it diagonally in opposite directions in your hands until you feel it loosening up.
- I do not recommend paint overdyer for people clothing unless it is say used in a costume or other temporary wearables. I once successfully paint overdyed a small vintage quilt because it had never seen the light of day and looked too new.
- It can be lightly washed but let it air dry.
- Paint overdyed fabric may be ironed and misted with water if wrinkles need more attention.
- Paint overdyer will slightly crisp up the fabric but for dolls this can be a real advantage.

SIMPLE OVERDYEING TO AGE WHITES & BRIGHT PRINTS

- For many years, this was all I used my paint overdyes for. It was only when it became ever more difficult to find very fine weight fabrics for my tiny dolls that I realized why not try colors on the same fine weight batistes, voiles, cotton lawn and silks I was already using. Especially for dolls in the 3" scale, the weight of fabric can determine whether clothing can be made at all or in any case to drape nicely.
- On my website I sell my own paint colors (arrived at with many hours of experimentation necessary for different fabric types) in Original (sometimes referred to as "Regular"), Yellowing and Overdyer for Doll Body Fabric (intended for a darker look for vintage cloth doll body fabric). To distinguish between the Original and Yellowing (I find we need to have both) since it is not always a given which one you will like the best in any situation, the original formula should be thought of as giving the aged and dirty look and for toning down that too bright look of many prints and fabrics, and the new formula for when a more aged, but yellowed look is desired. I found the yellowing formula best on laces and some whites. An example of how fickle dyeing is, I use my Original recipe on most fabrics and my regular fine batiste, but for the extra fine batiste I find the Yellowing works best. Most times we need Yellowing on laces used but Original on the batiste even if they are going together. This is why I recommend having both recipes on hand and why you need to experiment on small pieces if you are mixing your own colors.

MIXING COLORS AND MAKE YOUR OWN PAINT OVERDYE:

You can make your own paint overdye in two categories. One is what I call basic aging or toning down bright colors or whites within prints, or as we say here "browning it down". The other is more like using paint colors to dye a color. The main reason for this in my world is that I don't like how modern dyed solid colors in cotton look and I prefer to use fine drapey fabrics in weights no longer available on the market. I can only find this weight cotton fabric in whites or sometimes a modern baby blue, pink or yellow but none of the more muted colors I prefer. Using paint as an overdye is infinitely and easily adjustable but a hidden side effect is the slight crisping up of the fine fabric makes it much easier to work with with little fraying, easier folding and drawing on of patterns.

HINT: *When testing colors on fabric, remember that wet fabric will be almost twice as dark wet as dry, so before judging, dry your swatch. For tiny swatches (never the whole piece of fabric) after thoroughly blotting as dry as possible, I then cheat a bit and iron dry. Also, take your swatch into real daylight where colors show up true. Often a color result will look just right in our shop (even under "daylight" light bulbs) but show up looking pinky outside.*

HOW TO CHOOSE COLORS:

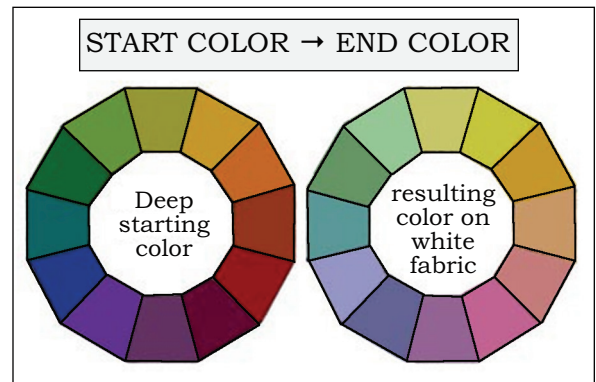
This is not an exact science. Even when you get your "perfect" recipe it may change from one day to the next and certainly will change depending on different fabrics. Always make test swatches and keep notes as you work so you can get back there. For aging or toning down bright colors or whites within prints, you will need a paint mix in a caramel/khaki color to get the antiqued look. If you want to do colors, you can, but they will always be tints of the color due to the white or lightness of your fabric. You should do some experiments in other scrap cloth first to see if you are happy with the color results of your color mix. The mix can be used several times and stored in a jar. (It will start to smell funny, but it still works fine - keeping it in your frig helps).

BASIC AGING COLOR:

For general aging color, I like a color that could be called a khaki or mud puddle or coffee (with cream) color. Use in proportions in the section "Guide for Paint to Water Ratio". I also use this to make overly bright colors (say hot pink) more old looking and to "brown down" any whites within prints. This color is available on my website if you don't want to mix your own.

OTHER COLORS:

It will take a deep value of paint color to produce at most a rich tint or tone (pastel or muted version) of any color. In other words, if you want a rosey pink, you will need some saturated hue of dark red. Try to avoid paint colors that already have white in them. You want the purest, deepest hue that you can get in the family of color you are looking for because it will become a lesser tint value after dipping in white or light fabric. I have included two color wheels to illustrate my point, though they are not intended to be used for real results - they are images I borrowed from the internet to illustrate the idea. You have to start with paint as deep a color in the family you want (the color wheel shown on left). Once water has been added and then applied to white fabric, you will only be able to arrive at a pastel version (color wheel on right).



OTHER ASSORTED TIPS:

It would take an entire color design course to include everything there is to know but here are some tips I find myself telling my assistants here time and again. Be ready to experiment on swatches. Have a color wheel of mixing colors (plus brown) in the truest deepest hues you can find. I don't find using black as a mixer helps.

- We recently discovered that a pre-overdye using the basic khaki aging GW overdye helps the colored overdyes to "take" better. Sort of like priming before you paint a wall or woodwork.
- The airier the weave, the lighter the color will be due to air spaces between the threads.
- The easy color rules we all know also work here (blue + yellow = green, etc.).
- Add green if too pink (for some reason in trying for dirty off-whites, the color will come out on the pink side quite frequently, so add a touch of green) - this is based on green + red = brown.
- Adding a brown to mute deep colors.
- To arrive at "salmon" or an antique rose pink, you will need orange added to a red.

SAMPLES OF DOLL CLOTHES MADE FROM PAINT OVERDYED FABRICS AND LACES



Paint overdyed gown on 8" tall doll using a dense blue paint.



This gown was paint overdyed using a deep rose paint. Note that lace is overdyed using the basic aging overdyer, however, if you look carefully, you can see that I mixed up lace dye lots in the lace on the skirt and the laces in the bodice.



This 9" doll has had her bonnet, dress, pinafore and undies fabrics paint overdyed plus laces and silk ribbons.



One of my Tiny dolls (3") with paint overdyed fabrics, ribbons, and lace.



All of the fabrics and trims on this pair of my Tiny dolls (3.5") are paint overdyed.



Another of my Tiny dolls (3") with paint overdyed fabric and lace. This one is a peachy salmon.