

MAKING FABRICS (AND SOME TRIMS) LOOK AGED WITH PAINT OVERDYE

by GAIL WILSON ©

PREPARATIONS:

Before digging into your fabrics and patterns, you will need to determine which fabrics and any accompanying laces and strings, etc. should be overdyed. 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 new. Overdyeing in this way should be done **before** cutting fabric. 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 it, but I don't really believe 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.

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.). See below for notes on using colors.

MIXING YOUR OWN PAINT OVERDYE: You will need a water base paint (acrylic or house - latex) paint mix in a caramel/khaki color for an antiqued look. If you want to do colors, you can, but they will always be pastel due to the water to paint ratio. 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).

PAINT TO WATER RATIOS: 1 tablespoon to 1½ cups of water for a light wash of color or 2 tablespoons to 1½ cups of water for a darker aged look. Keep in mind that wet things look more than twice as dark as dry.

MIXING HINTS:

- *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.*
- *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.*

THE PROCEDURE:

- (1) You will need a small container that holds a quart or two depending on how much you are mixing. Use a 1" wide flat brush (I keep a cheap pastry brush or this job) to swab out **all** of the paint from whatever you measured it in. Use the brush to mop the bottom of your container where the paint settles and also use it to just generally stir. This mixture will settle out fast, so keep the brush handy to stir it often while in use. If you keep the dye mix in a jar, note that shaking doesn't always do enough mixing - *you need to use the brush*. 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.
- (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. **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.

CORRECTIONS:

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, not just a longer soak in the mixture.

GOING FOR COLORS:

Many of my Tiny Dolls' clothes were made using paint to dye the fabrics (and trims). Use any good acrylic paints while keeping some basics in mind. Usually the fabric being used starts out white. In color design, white will always dominate. So you will end up with a pastel. To even get a richer pastel, you will need the most vibrant paint you can in your color choices. Adding more paint to water ratio helps, but the downside will be the fabric getting stiffer. Best to experiment to make sure of getting your desired effects.