

Basic Dyeing with Kool-Aid

Protein fiber can be successfully dyed with unsweetened soft drink mixes such as Kool-Aid or Flavor-Aid. The process is easy, virtually foolproof, and produces color- and lightfast dyed fiber. You can dye either unspun fiber or spun yarn (handspun or commercial).

The process below is for basic Kool-Aid dyeing. Once you've done that, you can experiment with producing multi-colored fiber, mixing Kool-Aid colors before dyeing, more or less brilliant colors, starting with a different color of fiber, etc. The possibilities are vast. Have fun!

Choosing Your Fiber:

You are not limited to just dyeing white fiber. Other colors, such as natural grey, produce absolutely stunning results. White fiber will result in intense colors while grey fiber dyed with Kool-Aid will produce deep, rich, heathery colors.

Dyeing unspun fiber, then carding and spinning it will result in yarn in which the color is more evenly distributed. Also, be aware that, when dyeing unspun fiber, the color will not look as bright until it is spun. To ensure the best dye results, unspun fiber should be washed prior to dyeing.

Both commercially prepared and handspun yarns work equally well. You can use superwash or more traditionally prepared yarns. If you plan on using superwash wool, be aware that it absorbs the color much more quickly than does non-superwash and the colors may seem a bit more brilliant than its non-superwash brethren.

What You Need:

- ✓ Protein fiber (wool, alpaca, silk, etc.) made into loosely tied skeins.
- ✓ Unsweetened Kool-Aid packages. A good starting point is one package of Kool-Aid per one ounce of fiber.
- ✓ Water
- ✓ Vinegar
- ✓ **For stovetop method:** stainless steel or unchipped enamel pot. **DO NOT use aluminum or cast iron.** If you plan on dyeing more than a single ounce at a time, use a large soup pot.
- or -
- ✓ **For microwave method:** Pyrex or other heat resistant **glass** pan, microwavable clear plastic wrap (such as Handi-Wrap or Saran Wrap). Masking tape to tape up the ends of the plastic wrap once you've wrapped the dye-saturated yarn.
- ✓ Small plastic spatula for mixing.
- ✓ Rubber gloves, otherwise you will end dyeing your fingers in the process.
- ✓ Heat source.

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The Basic Recipe:

As a starting point, for each ounce of fiber (spun or unspun) you plan on dyeing, use:

One package of unsweetened Kool-Aid

Liquid (8 oz total):

6 ounces of water

2 ounces of vinegar

If you want the color to be less intense, use less Kool-Aid in the same amount of water. Conversely, more Kool-Aid will give you more color. For consistent results, dissolve the Kool-Aid in the water/vinegar solution and dilute the resulting solution.

Dyeing with Kool-Aid does not require a mordant.

How to Dye Your Fiber:

There are two basic methods for dyeing fiber with Kool-Aid: the microwave method and the stovetop method. Each works very well, although your results may vary slightly.

Use the microwave method for:

- Dyeing small quantities of yarn (four ounces or less) in the same color
- Handpainting multiple colors on the same skein
- Producing a more “mottled” or varied single color.

Use the stovetop method for:

- Dyeing larger quantities of the same color
- Producing a more uniform distribution of color.

Microwave Method:

1. Soak fiber in hot water for at least 20 to 30 minutes.
2. While it is soaking, make your Kool-Aid solution(s). For each package of Kool-Aid use 3 parts water to one part vinegar.
3. Remove your fiber from the hot water soak. Squeeze out excess water.
4. Place the fiber on a long sheet of plastic wrap.
5. Pour dye over fiber slowly, being sure that you cover as much of the fiber as possible.
6. Wrap the fiber up in the plastic wrap. If you want, you can secure the ends with masking tape.
7. Squish the dye liquid around the wrapped fiber until all the fiber has been covered with the dye.
8. Place in the pyrex container.
9. Place container (with fiber) in the microwave and microwave for 2 minutes
10. Let rest for two minutes. If necessary, during this period, you may squish the liquid around again to ensure adequate dye coverage.
11. Check to see if the solution is colorless.
CAUTION: When checking your fiber, the contents will be very, very hot!!! Be careful of any escaping steam. Avoid putting your face or hands directly over the wrapped fiber packet in case it opens unexpectedly.
12. If the solution is not colorless, repeat steps 9, 10 and 11 until the solution is colorless.

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13. Rinse the fiber thoroughly in water the same temperature as the dye bath. At this point you may want to wash the fiber with liquid dishwashing detergent and rinse thoroughly using the procedure that you normally use for washing yarn.
14. Hang the fiber and let it air dry.

Stovetop Method:

1. Soak fiber in hot water for at least 20 to 30 minutes.
2. While it is soaking, make your Kool-Aid bath. For each package of Kool-Aid use 3 parts water to one part vinegar.
3. Heat the dye solution to just below boiling.
4. Remove your fiber from the hot water soak. Squeeze out excess water.
5. Add your fiber to the dye bath. Be sure that the fiber is completely submerged in the dye solution. If necessary, add more water so your fiber is completely covered and ensure even dyeing. Adding some additional water will not affect the final result.
6. Simmer for about 45 minutes or until all the color is gone. During this time, carefully turn the fiber periodically in the dye bath so it absorbs the color more evenly. When the color in the dye bath completely disappears - the bath becomes a clear colorless liquid or a white, milky liquid - depending on the flavor of Kool-Aid you used - turn off the burner.
7. Let the solution cool until it reaches a temperature with which you can comfortably handle the fiber.
8. Rinse the fiber thoroughly in water the same temperature as the dye bath. At this point you may want to wash the fiber with liquid dishwashing detergent and rinse thoroughly using the procedure that you normally use for washing yarn.
9. Hang the fiber and let it air dry.

References:

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