

Dyeing Wool for Rug Braiders

Instructor: Christine Manges

2nd Wednesdays at 1pm EST over Zoom: Sept 9, Oct 7, Nov 11, Dec 9, 2026; Jan 13, Feb 10, Mar 10, Apr 7, May 12, & Jun 9, 2027

Introduction

Wool is absolutely the best fiber for braiding rugs: it is durable, stain resistant, warm and wonderful to braid with. It is, however, increasingly rare and expensive... which means we can't always afford or even find the colors that we want for braided rugs.

Wool is easily dyed to magnificent solid colors, and even more beautifully "mottled" to create stunning fabrics for braiding. If you have ugly wools that are good fabrics but you hate the color... over-dye them!

Most of the books on dyeing wool fabric are geared toward rug hookers. There are some distinct differences between dyeing for rug hookers and dyeing for rug braiders. For one thing, we have elephant-sized wools to dye in comparison to their mosquito-sized instructions: dyeing different shades of color in glass jars is simply impossible. For another thing, the effects seen in the fabric are limited for braiders: a technique that creates fine detail is irrelevant when you realize that only 1/8 of a fabric strip is ever visible in braid loops.

In this class, we'll learn to dye and over-dye wool for rugs, with a different technique in each class. Most classes use ONE YARD of wool for dyeing, in either yardage or scraps, although the Gradient Transitions class will cover dyeing 3 yards at once. Acid Fast Dyes from ProChem are used for demonstrations in these classes, but you can also use W Cushing, Jacquard/Dharma Trading, or Magic Carpet/Wanda Works (Canada only) dyes. We'll refer to the Primary Fusion booklet on dyeing if you wish to mix your dyes; if you prefer to purchase pre-mixed colors or use natural dyes, that is also fine.

Part 1: Dyeing without Dye

This first 3 classes don't require you to have purchased any equipment yet: they are simply designed to orient you to the supplies required, what the cheapest alternatives are, and how all the books out there on dyeing for rug hookers (who often dye 3" X 12" pieces of wool) can be adapted for braiders... where a yard is about the minimum necessary.

Class #1: Orientation to Dyeing Supplies; Marrying Wool

Sept 9, 2026

In the first class, I will show how leftover pieces of wool fabric can be used to "marry" colors together for braiding. By cooking them together in mildly soapy water, those leftover or ugly pieces of wool can release their dyes and create some uniformity of color among them. The amount you stir the fabric – a lot, or not at all – will determine how much the colors intermarry.

Class #2: Transferring Dye: Silk Ties, Plaids, Linings

Oct 7, 2026

The second class focuses on transferring dye from one fabric to another. We'll use silk ties – which are a lot of fun, but frankly, don't create a large-enough patterned area to really be useful for braiders. We'll transfer plaids, and this technique is particularly useful when you're about to run out of fabric because it can extend your ability to use a plaid in a rug. We'll also use linings from recycled clothing to color our wools.

Class #3: Marbleizing Colors: Strips, or Yardage

Nov 11, 2026

The third class creates fascinating "marbled" colors. By wrapping 3 colors together, then twisting them tightly, the 3 colors interact and displace some of their dye onto each other. Wonderful and unpredictable effects! Use up your old strips to create new and fun marbled colors.

Part 2: Dyeing with Acid Fast Dyes (Basics)

Class #4: Dyeing Wool a Solid Color and Over-dyeing Ugly Wool Dec 9, 2026

The fourth class finally uses purchased dye! We'll dye wool a solid color and additionally over-dye (in a separate dye pot) some ugly wool a new color.

Instead of using just one yard of white wool for dyeing, I'm going to pick a few different light colors and patterned fabrics to over-dye with a single dye color. We'll point out the differences between fabrics known to contain polyester or nylon versus 100% wool fabrics. We'll also learn what 0.5% OWG means after the color swatches of dye on the ProChem and other websites. See example right.

Lemon Drop WF106 0.5%OWG

Class #5: Dyeing Wool a Mottled Color Jan 13, 2027

This fifth class covers ways to introduce dark and light areas of the same color within a fabric. While a more subtle effect, the dark and light areas give the fabric more interest when braided up. The mottled effect is achieved by earlier addition of acid, less frequent stirring, and using less water in the dye pot.

Class #6: Spot Dyes Feb 10, 2027

Spot-dyed wool includes a mix of techniques to create beautiful mixed wools. Generally, the wool shaped into one heavily convoluted layer with a lot of peaks and valleys. The dyes are added to specific areas and the peaks and valleys help to concentrate colors in these areas. Additional dye can be added to create little pops of color with chopsticks. Some like to use pour methods, some squeeze bottles, some chopsticks.... some all three.

Bonus Class: Ice Dyeing TBD

I've never ice-dyed, so I'm not charging for this class. We'll experiment together! We'll figure out a date somewhere in the dark of winter and ice-dye together. Make sure to have an N-95 mask or a respirator, since we'll be sprinkling dry dye, which is not good to inhale.

Part 3: Dyeing with Acid Fast Dyes (Fancy)

Class #7: Gradients Mar 10, 2027

Many of us like to braid rugs with a color "theme" that involves lighter and darker versions of the same color. There are several ways to create gradients in dyeing; one involves dipping, another adding pieces at separate times (darkest first, lightest last)... removing pieces as needed when the value is achieved.

Class #8: Transitional Gradients Apr 7, 2027

One of my favorite techniques... three different dyes are used to dye one-third of 2- or 3-yard long pieces of wool, in the same dye pot. Wonderful transitioning colors are created by splashing the second color onto the edge of the first, and the third color onto the edge of the second. This technique uses one dye pot, but two adjacent "parking" pots are used. I have used this technique to create award-winning strip rugs!

Class #9: Shibori Techniques on Wool: Block Dyes, Tie-Dyeing May 12, 2027

Are you old enough to remember tie-dyeing T-shirts in the 1970's? We'll explore some of the simplest "Shibori" techniques but apply them to wool. Have rubber bands, binder clips, tongue depressors, small blocks of wood, chickpeas, and non-stretchable string or yarn for this class.

Class #10: Shibori Techniques on Wool: Stitching, Folding June 9, 2027

Certain Shibori techniques are, in my opinion, too fine to bother with for wool. Wool is much thicker than the standard cotton or linen fabrics used in Shibori, and we use so much wool, that some of the time-consuming stitching is simply lost in the folds of the braiding strands. That said, there are certain Shibori techniques that create interesting effects that are fun to braid with. They take a lot of prep, but are cool!

Dyeing Equipment

NOTE: Dyes (including “natural dyes”) are toxic. Once you use ANY equipment for dyeing, it can never again be used for regular cooking. Keep all items separate.

Checklist: Supplies for Dyeing Wool**Fabric/Braid Supplies:**

- ☐ Typical braid supplies
- ☐ light-colored wool in 1-yard pieces; see individual classes for more detail.
- ☐ mixed wool rolls and scraps with braidable lengths
- ☐ A whole lot of sturdy safety pins (1” to 1.25”)

Dye Supplies – Equipment

- ☐ Steam Table Pan (full size or 22” X 12”, by 4 or 6” deep)
- ☐ Foil turkey roasters (the large disposable kind) – several sets
- ☐ Stove top, or electric double burners, or large electric turkey roasters
- ☐ Tri-pour plastic beakers (order from ProChem), 3 each of 250 ml and 1000 ml **OR** several 1, 2, and 4 cup Pyrex glass measuring cups - dedicated to dyeing
- ☐ Large Tongs and/or large metal spoons with long handles - dedicated to dyeing
- ☐ Measuring Spoons: 1 Tbsp, 1 tsp, ½ tsp, ¼ tsp, 1/8 tsp - dedicated to dyeing
- ☐ Heat-Resistant Gloves such as Bluettes
- ☐ Electric Tea Kettle --OR saucepans-- to heat water (don’t have to be dedicated to dyeing)
- ☐ Large plastic bucket or bin to soak wool in and transport wet fabric

Dye Supplies – Chemistry

- ☐ 2 oz of dye in three to six colors
- ☐ Citric Acid Crystals **OR** Distilled white vinegar 5%
- ☐ Salt – non-iodized
- ☐ Synthrapol **OR** Jet Dry

Miscellaneous Stuff

- ☐ Paper Towels (cover counters, test dye colors)
- ☐ Shower Liners or Trash Bags (cover counters, floor)
- ☐ Toothpicks (level off measuring spoons of dye)
- ☐ Plastic Spoons (stir dye to dissolve it)
- ☐ Glass Jar with Lid (peanut butter size – half-fill w/ non-iodized salt for quickly cleaning measuring spoons by dredging them in the salt)
- ☐ N-95 mask or respirator (when measuring dry dye)
- ☐ Pot holders - dedicated to dyeing
- ☐ Kitchen sponge - dedicated to dyeing
- ☐ Composition Book: keep detailed notes on what dyes you used, what amounts, and then staple in dyed fabric samples to see what the result was.
- ☐ 4” or 6” Doll needle, 0.8 to 1 mm braided nylon cording
- ☐ A lot of buttons with 2 or 4 holes (3/4” inch size or greater)
- ☐ Hand-grip spring clamps, large binder clips, wood shapes or tongue depressors

A. Dye

There are different types of dyes for wool: Acid Fast, Sabraset/Lanaset, “natural” (plants, seeds, bugs), and food dye or Kool-aid. The latter two create beautiful colors and but wash out quickly. The Sabraset dyes are the most color-fast over time, but most rug hookers use Acid Fast dyes, and that’s what I have the most experience with... so that’s what we’ll use in this class. All the demonstrations in the class will be with Pro-Chem Acid Fast dyes.

The “acid fast” dyes work for wool, silk, camel, cashmere, alpaca, angora, and mohair; also nylon. If you have a wool blend that contains polyester, the dye may not “take” quite as darkly. Many wool blends are with nylon: these blends will fully take up dye. Acid fast dyes are not suited for cotton or polyester.

The book, Primary Fusion, enables you to work with only 4 colors (magenta, sun yellow, brilliant blue, and black) and mix them according to formulas to create a rainbow of dyes. Alternatively, purchase ready-made colors, such as the Prochem colors found in photo, right.



*SIZE:

2 oz. 8 oz. 1 lb. 2 lb. 5 lb. 10 lb.

ProChemical & Dye <https://prochemicalanddye.net/pro-washfast-acid-dyes.html>

W. Cushing Dye

<https://wcushing.com/product/perfection-acid-dyes/>

Jacquard Dye: <https://www.dharmatrading.com/dyes/jacquard-acid-dyes.html>

<https://www.jacquardproducts.com/acid-dye> - information sheets

<https://www.dharmatrading.com/blogs/a/dharma-acid-dye>

Magic Carpet Dye (Canada only):

https://www.wandaworks.ca/store/c2/Majic_Carpet_Dyes.html#/

B. Equipment: Note: all equipment that is used in dyeing wool must NEVER AGAIN be used for cooking. The dyes are poisonous and can harm you. Keep all your equipment in your dye pan and away from the cooking area.

1. **Dye Pot or Pan:** stainless steel restaurant pans, ceramic pots, canners, turkey cookers all will work, but I really recommend a full-size restaurant steam table pan that is 4 to 6 inches deep because we’re dyeing a lot of wool. My restaurant pan is 6” deep and “full size” = 22” long, 12.5” wide, capacity 5.5 gallon.



Choice Full
Size 4" Dee...



Choice Full
Size 6" Dee...



Cheaper alternative: 20 X 12 X 3.25 inch foil pans – 2 for \$4 at Walmart.

It’s nice to have one or two of these around for parking fabric. However: these are only good for *one or two uses* as a dye pot before they develop holes and leak dye liquid all over your stove and floor.

2. **Large & long stainless steel spoon/tongs:** for stirring the fabric in the dye water, and for lifting the fabric out of the dye water. Try thrift stores first. Get large ones. Don’t get ones that have rust on them – rust is an effective fabric dye! Cheapest place to buy: <https://www.webstaurantstore.com/>



3. **Pyrex or plastic measuring cups**/beakers, at least 1 cup and 2 cup, several of each. Check thrift stores for Pyrex measuring cups. I like the tri-pour plastic beakers from ProChem and usually end up using all 6: three in both sizes (250 & 1000 ml).

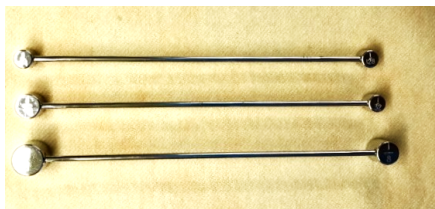
<https://prochemicalanddye.net/tools-supplies/measuring-equipment-scales/tri-pour-beakers.html>

4. **Measuring spoons**: at least $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, 1 tsp, 1 Tbsp. If you get very involved in dyeing, you may want to buy even smaller measuring spoons – cheapest is the “**Dash, Drop, Smidgen...**”

Dash = $\frac{1}{4}$, *Drop* = $\frac{1}{8}$, *Smidgen* = $\frac{1}{16}$, *Pinch* = $\frac{1}{32}$, *Tad* = $\frac{1}{64}$ teaspoon

<https://www.amazon.com/Libertyware-Smidgen-Pinch-Measuring-Spoon/dp/B002X9I4RC> \$6

However, most dedicated dyers use “**Precision Dye Spoons.**” Obtain them from Dorr Mill Store, W. Cushing. Full set ~\$75.



Photos above show: Dash/drop/smidgen teaspoons; Precision dye spoons; water kettle, Bluettes gloves

5. **Heat Resistant gloves**: “**Bluettes**” insulated gloves. Find in hardware stores, some groceries

6. **Trash bags/plastic shower liner** to cover the counters and floors and prevent staining.

7. **Paper towels (white)** – to line the surrounding area and for quick tests of dye color

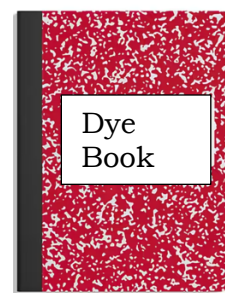
8. **Plastic spoons + wood chopsticks + wooden spoons** – for stirring the dye, which can take a while to dissolve, and for spot dyeing (chopsticks)



OR



OR



Non-iodized salt jar, Citric Acid crystals OR Distilled Vinegar, Synthrapol OR Jet Dry, Dye Book

9. **Toothpicks** – to level off dye measurements

10. **Clean jar filled half-filled with non-iodized salt** (and lid) – for quickly cleaning off measuring spoons by stirring them vigorously in the salt. You don't want to dip a spoon with red dye on it into a yellow dye container. Peanut butter or small salsa jars are the right size.

11. **Electric Tea Kettle...or saucepan** for heating water – doesn't have to be dyeing-dedicated because it will only be used for heating water.

12. Dedicated **pot-holders** and **kitchen sponge** – only use for dyeing equipment

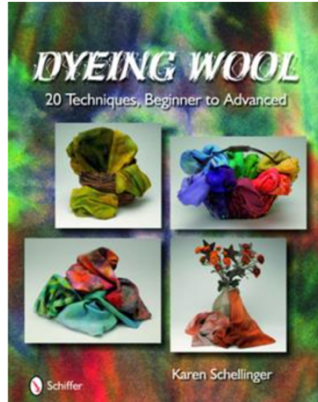
13. **Large plastic tub, bucket, bin, or kitty litter container**: for soaking wool, transporting the hot wet wool to the sink to be rinsed, and then to the dryer to be thrown in with some towels.

14. **Synthrapol** OR “**jet dry**” for dishwashers. These are “wetting” agents: help the wool get really wet to absorb dye.

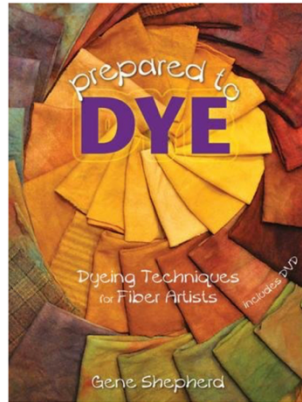
15. Either: **distilled white vinegar 5%**, OR **citric acid crystals**. You'll need 1 cup per yard of fabric if using white vinegar, and 1 Tbsp per yard of fabric if using citric acid crystals. Buy vinegar at the grocery store, and citric acid at Prochem or other dye-selling sites.

16. A bunch of **safety pins**, an **N-95 mask**, and a **Composition Book**.

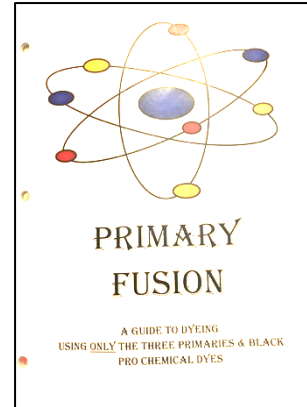
Dye books:



Dyeing Wool
By Karen Schellinger



Prepared to Dye
by Gene Shepherd



Primary Fusion
by Ingrid Hieronimus

Primary Fusion booklet: Using just 4 dye colors (Sun Yellow, Black, Brilliant Blue, and Magenta), the book gives recipes for creating the dye colors in the samples (\$75 for swatches of the recipe colors). <http://www.rughookinghome.com/categories/5>

PRO WashFast Acid Dye 119 Sun Yellow - 2 or more oz
 PRO WashFast Acid Dye 338 Magenta - 2 or more oz
 PRO WashFast Acid Dye 490 Brilliant Blue - 2 or more oz
 PRO WashFast Acid Dye 672 Jet Black - 2 or more oz

Specific Equipment for Shibori Dyeing

- Blocks of wood for clamping
- Binder clips XL
- Tongue depressors
- Spring Clamps
- Rubberbands
- Doll needle (4-6")
- 0.8 to 1mm nylon braided cording (cords for venetian blinds)
- A jar of old buttons with 2 to 4 holes
- Extra large tinfoil trays (turkey roaster size) for parking wool on either side of the dye pot (multicolor gradients)

