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Snow Dyeing using PRO MX Dyes

Please read directions carefully before starting.

These directions are courtesy of Nancy S. Breland. We tested them and ended up with great results!

PRO MX reactive dyes are designed to give even, reproducible colors when applied at room temperature. Chilling the dye concentrates by mixing them with snow causes some dyes to separate into their component colors, and makes the dyes strike the fabric at different rates. The results are surprising and always beautiful.

Safety First: As with all methods of dyeing, be sure to follow safety instructions. Wear old clothes and rubber gloves. Utensils and containers used for dyeing should never be used for food preparation. Mix dye powders out of doors or with a mixing box indoors, and wear a protective mask. See our Studio Safety Guidelines.

What to Snow Dye

Any fabric that can be dyed with PRO MX Fiber Reactive Dye (also called Procion Dye) can be used for snow dyeing. Cotton fabric, cotton clothing, silk scarves and household linens all work well. To prepare them for dyeing, the fabrics must be washed to remove any dirt, oils or sizing that may be in them.

Supplies

PRO MX Fiber Reactive Dye Powder
Urea
Soda Ash
Synthrapol

Surface for laying fabric on

Containers to catch the melted snow/dye mixture
Bowls and spoons for snow
Containers for liquids.

How to Snow Dye

1. Prepare soda ash solution. Dissolve 9 tbsp of soda ash in one gallon of warm water. Note: Soda ash water can be re-used, and saved indefinitely. It can be stored in large plastic soda bottles.

2. Prepare dye concentrates. Dissolve 2 tbsp urea in one cup of warm water. (Used plastic water or soda bottles make good containers for dye concentrate.) Add two tablespoons of dye

powder. Note: Urea water and soda ash water can be prepared safely indoors. It is safest to go outdoors to add the dye powder. Always wear a mask. Dye concentrate can also be saved as long as it has not been contaminated with even a small amount of soda ash.

3. Soak the fabric in soda ash water for at least 10 minutes.

4. Lay Out fabric or other items to dye. Remove the fabric from the soda ash container, and wring it out. Put your wet fabric on a surface that will allow liquid to drain as the snow melts. You can put the fabric on a waterproof surface, like a piece of Plexiglas or glass, or on the back of a plastic or metal tray. After adding the snow, set this surface on a slant so the snow will melt into a container. Alternatively you can put the fabric on a porous surface like a screen or tray with draining holes, and put this surface over a sink or other basin.

For basic snow dyeing, scrunch up the prepared fabric (soaked in soda ash water) evenly on the surface, making little peaks and valleys. Leave room on your surface to pack the snow around the edges of the fabric. For variation, fabrics can be roughly pleated or twisted or arranged in other patterns. Note that tightly compressed fabric will resist the dyes, leaving white areas when rinsed.

5. Gather some clean snow. Note: you can also make "snow" using a snow cone machine. This snow is grainier and heavier, but works well.

6. Mix snow with dyes. There are two ways to do this. To get more controlled results, mix the dye concentrate into snow in a large mixing bowl. A quarter cup or less of dye concentrate mixed into a large mixing bowl of snow (20 cup or more capacity) will give strong color to a yard of fabric. Fluffy snow may reduce in volume with mixing, so add more snow. Pastels need less dye concentrate, but the same amount of snow. Note that it is difficult to get very dark colors with snow dyeing because the snow will always dilute the dye.

Mix several smaller bowls of snow/dye mixture if you want to make multicolored fabric.

Wearing gloves, pile the colored slush on top of the fabric and around the sides. The snow should be about 3 inches high. You'll need more snow if it is fluffy. If you are dyeing thick fabric, like t-shirts, you'll also need more snow. Don't skim on the slush. You need enough liquid to soak through the fabric.

Alternate method - applying dye directly to snow. Put clean snow on top of and all around the fabric, to a depth of 3 or more inches. Pour (or use a squeeze bottle) dye concentrate directly on the snow, distributing dye across the surface area. Use several colors. Results may be bold and high contrast, with some white areas.

7. Put the tray somewhere where it can melt and drain into a container. Never drain the snow on to soil, as this can be harmful to plants and wildlife. When snow has melted and some of the fabric is exposed, cover the fabric loosely with plastic, so it doesn't dry out. When all of the snow has melted and the liquid is drained off, move the tray to a warm place, at least 70 degrees, and cover tightly with plastic. Some darker colors may benefit from warmer temperatures, 80 degrees or more, which can be achieved if the tray is set near a heating vent. Do not put the fabric in a microwave. Allow the dyes to set for 4 or more hours, or overnight.

8. Rinse out. Rinse the dyed fabric several times with warm water. Then wash with hot water and a little Synthrapol. Continuing rinsing until the water runs clear.

Note on colors: Some dyes are made of only one color, and will not separate into component colors when chilled. These colors are marked "manufactured colors" on the order form. Most PRO MX Reactive Dyes are made of mixtures of colors, and these may separate and strike the fabric differently when chilled. For example, PRO MX 8194 Ultraviolet separates into blue and rose, and is ideal for snow dyeing.

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