



Spinning the Shirley Simpson Way: Part 3: Coats of Many Colours – Dyeing Alpaca Yarns

Alpaca, in all its forms, dyes beautifully with synthetic and natural dyes. Lanaset dyes have been my preferred choice of synthetic dye for some twenty years. They are manufactured to international specifications and, as such, are always of the highest quality and concentration. This ties in well with the high commercial value of alpaca fibre. In the next article I will write about dyeing alpaca tops and fleece with synthetic dyes; moving on to the use of natural dyes and natural dye extracts in later issues.

Lanaset dyes are available in a range of fifteen colours, all of which are completely intermixable. It is easy to be confused when selecting your first dyes. I suggest that you buy three primary colours:- either Bright Red, Bright Yellow and Royal Blue or Dull Red, Gold and Navy.

Mix - red and yellow for orange, blue and yellow for green, blue and red for purple. In use these dyes are mixed with water to form solutions. Measured amounts of solutions are added to water in a dye bath. It is possible to achieve very pale shades through to deeply intense values simply by varying the amount of stock solution added to the dye bath. The dyes must have an acid present in the dye bath to bond the dye to yarn. White vinegar, which contains acetic acid, is added to the dye bath to achieve this result.

Safety suggestions

We have to be aware that synthetic dyeing involves the use of substances which could cause ill effects if swallowed or inhaled.

1. Store dyes, dyeing assistants and dyeing equipment in a secure cupboard out of the reach of children.
2. All equipment used for dyeing must be kept solely for that purpose and marked thus with enamel paint or a waterproof pen.
3. Keep an old shirt or apron to wear when dyeing and make use of disposable gloves and a dust mask when handling dye powders.

Lanaset dyes are made into stock solutions before use:-

To prepare one pint:-

1. Measure 1 level teaspoon of dye powder into a measuring jug. Add one or two drops of washing up liquid.
2. Mix powder to a smooth paste using a little hot water.
3. Slowly, add very hot water to make up to one pint exactly. Stir well.
4. Cool. Pour into a clean bottle. Label eg:- (Dull Red-Date)

This quantity of dyestock will dye 1lb of fibre to a medium value.

White Vinegar (distilled malt vinegar)

This is the acid dyeing assistant which must be used with Lanaset dyes. Vinegar contains 4-5% acetic acid and is usually available in large supermarkets or Farmers' Co-ops. It is added to the water in a dye bath. Malt vinegar is less suitable as it contains caramel colouring which can be transferred to pale dye mixes. Add 1½ tablespoons of white vinegar to each pint of liquid in the recipe or 3 tablespoons to each quart.

Getting ready for dyeing – washing the yarn

1. Handspun yarns - make into 4oz hanks and tie loosely but securely in four places around the hank.
2. Machine spun yarns – prepare similarly.
3. Fill a bucket of with water just hotter than is comfortable for your hands. Add a few drops of concentrated washing up liquid. Stir.
4. Add yarn. Allow to soak for 2-3 hours or overnight.
5. Rinse in tepid water. YARN MUST BE WET BEFORE PUTTING INTO DYEBATH.

Preparing the Dyebath for 4 ozs yarn

Water (tepid) - allow 40 x weight of fibre. Therefore: 40 x 4 fluid ozs = 8 pts approx.
Vinegar - 6 tablespoons.

Dyestock solutions – for medium colours equalise dry weight of fibre with volume of dyestock; thus for 4ozs yarn allow 7 tablespoons of dyestock ,or 4 fluid ozs. This may be of one colour or a mix of 2 or 3 dyestocks TOTALLING 7 tablespoons or 4 fluid ozs. Put measured amounts of water, vinegar and dyestocks into dyebath. Stir thoroughly.

Put washed, wetted yarn into dyebath. Push yarn into solutions as quickly as possible. Heat dyebath SLOWLY to 80°/ 90° C allowing 30 – 40 minutes for this. Stir gently every 10 minutes or so to circulate dyestock evenly through yarn.

NB. Try not to exceed 90° C when dyeing any form of alpaca as it is vulnerable to sustained heat.

Hold at this temperature for a further 45 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Switch off heat source. Allow dyebath and contents to cool overnight if time permits.

Rinse yarn once in tepid water, then squeeze yarn through a bowl of warm soapy water – washing up liquid can serve as the detergent. Rinse well.

Place yarn in an old pillowcase. Tie the opening and then spin dry in a washing machine or spin drier. Or,roll in old towels to take up moisture. Hang yarn to dry.

There will not be any usable dye remaining in the dyebath. Dilute contents with plenty of cold water and dispose of down an outside drain.

It is not difficult to dye larger amounts of yarn. Work in 4 oz multiples and increase water, vinegar and dyes accordingly. One pound of yarn is probably the largest amount of yarn (+ water) that one person can handle safely.

Try to keep a record of your dye recipes. The dyed ties around hanks of yarn can be stapled into a notebook plus outline details of the dyes used and the weight of the yarn dyed.

Useful Addresses

For dyeing equipment:

P & M Woolcraft,
Pindon End,
Hanslope,
Milton Keynes,
MK 19 7HN

Outlets for large scale catering equipment can be a very good source for stainless steel dyebaths at reasonable prices.

"The Twisted Sisters Sock Workbook" by Lynne Vogel, published by Interweave Press. U.S.A. ISBN 1-931499 -16 -0 is obtainable from P & M Woolcraft. This book has an excellent section on working with Lanaset Dyes.

Lanaset dyes are available from:

Shirley Simpson,
Tom's Barn,
Dennington Road,
Framlingham,
Suffolk.
IP13 9UL

Please send an s.a.e. for a price list.