

## Coloring Wood Using Multiple Dyes

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I often get asked about dyeing wood and what steps are needed to create layers of color. While I have posted this information in various forums in the past, it is worth publishing again. For those of you who have yet to add color to your turnings, it is worth the effort to step outside of your comfort zone and give it a try! I remember getting to a point in my turning abilities where I liked what I was doing as far as

a form but sometimes the look of finished piece was blah. After going online and seeing some of the amazing things being done with dye, I knew I had to give it a try.

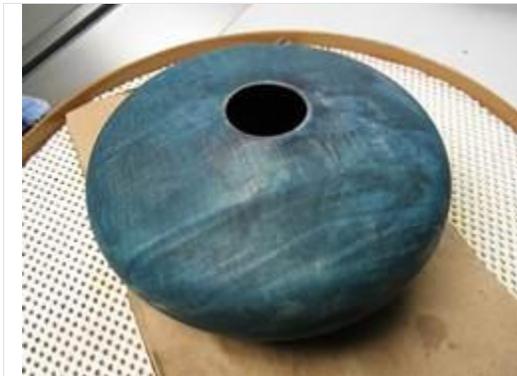
The turning I used for my first dye experiment was a small maple hollow form that had some beautiful curl. It would have been just fine if left alone but the natural maple color was fairly bland and I figured it would look better with some color. After finish sanding the hollow form with 320 grit, I removed it from the lathe and moved the operation over to my dye station - also known as a tablesaw!



First step was to put on some gloves, then using one of those plastic margarine containers, combined approximately 1 teaspoon of Black RIT powdered clothing dye with about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of denatured alcohol (DNA). If you haven't worked with DNA before, be advised - it evaporates extremely fast - so work quickly! The RIT powder didn't dissolve very well, so I used the handle of a 1" foam brush to break up some of

the dye granules. Using the other end of the 1" foam brush (duh!), applied the dye to the form - inside and out - until it was saturated. At that point I grabbed an old towel, wiped off all the excess and allowed the form to dry.

Once the wood was dry, I used 220 grit sandpaper and sanded the entire form. Didn't try to remove all the dye, just even things out and prep the wood for the next dye. You will find that wood absorbs dye more or less depending on a number of factors. Facegrain or endgrain makes a huge difference and when you 'even things out' you are blending in those areas that appear blotchy because of the uneven absorption rate. You also want to sand back any areas that you specifically want the next color to soak into, such as an area of curl.



The next dye to be used was Teal RIT powdered clothing dye. I again combined approximately 1 teaspoon of powdered dye with about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of DNA and mixed it up using a new 1" foam brush. I then applied the dye to the form, but this time just on the outside, making sure the exterior of the entire form was saturated. Using an old towel, I wiped off the excess and allowed it to dry.

Once the form was dry, I used 280 grit sandpaper and sanded everything down. Once again, not trying to remove all the dye - just prep the wood for the next color.



Using Yellow RIT powdered clothing dye, I followed the same application process and allowed the form to dry overnight.

The next day I sanded the form using 320 grit, wiped it down and then start applying Wipe-On Gloss Poly. The poly I used, Minwax Wipe-On Gloss, really darkens the colors and because it is an oil based finish, it did a great job on getting the curl to stand out.



The finished hollow form is 7" in diameter x 3 1/2" high x 1/8" thick, dyed with Black, Teal and Yellow RIT powdered clothing dyes that had been mixed with denatured alcohol (DNA). It has several coats of Minwax Wipe-On Gloss Poly, was buffed and given a coat of Renaissance wax after waiting a week for the finish to cure.

Note: All this took place a few years ago and I have learned a few things since then that I wish to share.

If you turn your forms thin, know that whatever dye you apply to the interior will very likely wick through to the outside of the form. This can result in some blotchy areas and detract from the overall ascetics of the finished piece. Most times, if you plan on dyeing your turning with only one color and saturate the inside and outside of the form at the same time, you won't have a problem. If you plan on using a number of different dyes, I have had good results by applying the dyes to the exterior of the form only. Follow the same procedure as listed above to apply all the different dyes. Then after poly has been applied to seal the exterior, come back and dye the interior. When touching up the interior, I use a foam brush but with enough dye on it to color the bare wood. Once the interior is dry, then apply poly to that area as well to seal the wood.



When you create your dye mixture, the lighter the color of the mixture is, the better. You can always add additional coats of dye as needed to build to the desired depth of color but you cannot remove it! So, start light and work your way up to your desired depth of color.



DNA dries quickly and may warp your turning while it is wet. Don't panic - it will return to its original shape once dry! DNA also raises the grain a little bit but nothing like water does. The raised grain is usually taken care of when you lightly sand between dye applications. The grit of sandpaper used makes a huge difference in how much dye the wood will absorb. If you sand your finished form to, let's

say 600 grit, it will absorb very little dye. By contrast, if that same form had been initially sanded to 220 grit, it would suck in the dye like a sponge. Again, make sure your color mixture is not too concentrated, especially if you are applying the dye to wood that was sanded with anything larger than 320 grit; i.e. 180 grit, 220 grit, 280 grit, etc.

I have read from many online sources that RIT dye will fade over time and will definitely fade when exposed to sunlight. I have changed over, for the most part, to TransTint dyes and hope that they will not fade as soon.

I use the same application process as stated above - whether for RIT, TransTint or any other dye I use.



Using dye is easy! Step outside of your comfort zone, take a chance and add some color to your turnings! It is not hard to do and the reward can be well worth it!!