

Copper Penny Dyeing



By: Kyle Kunnecke



Who knew dyeing yarn could be possible without even turning on a heat source! With a few simple household ingredients, white yarn is magically transformed into a beautiful color! The first time I heard about dyeing yarn with pennies was in a old natural dyeing book that another artist had left in one of my classrooms. Intrigued, I jotted down some notes and went hunting and gathering in my neighborhood for the required materials.

The only challenge in this technique might be locating 100 pre-1981 pennies, but here's a hint: after searching through change drawers and under the couch, visit your local bank and trade some paper bills for rolled pennies. After you are finished with the process, the pennies can be re-rolled and returned to the bank!

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Note that there are various versions of this recipe where sometimes the ammonia is substituted for vinegar, yielding similar results. Also, local (tap) water can vary the results, which is why distilled water is suggested. From what I have gathered, it seems that regardless of the technique, the color is somewhat fugitive; meaning that it could fade over time, but the result is beautiful and worth the effort.

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Materials & Ingredients

2 parts ($2\frac{2}{3}$ cup) distilled water
1 part ($1\frac{1}{3}$ cup) non-sudsy ammonia
100 pre-1981 copper pennies
4 cup glass jar with lid
glass measuring cup
plastic wrap
wool yarn (or fiber)
large plastic or glass bowl
strainer
vinegar
household rubber gloves



Solution Preparation

Place 100 pre-1981 pennies into glass jar and carefully add ammonia and distilled water. Place plastic wrap on top of the jar (to separate the metal lid from the liquid), then tighten lid on jar.

Allow jar to sit for a week in bright light; the solution will turn bright blue.

Dyeing Procedure

Prepare wool yarn (or fiber) by submerging it in room temperature water for a minimum of one hour (to be sure that it is fully wet). Using strainer, remove pennies from blue solution, taking care not to get the liquid on your skin. Remove soaking yarn from bowl of water and add it to the jar containing the blue solution.

Allow wool to remain submerged for 30 minutes or longer (until liquid becomes pale). Don't get discouraged when the color appears grey and dull. Remove yarn, rinse, and soak in a solution of vinegar and water; this wakes up the color and brings the yarn to life! Hang to dry, and enjoy!



Learn more about Kyle's work:
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Questions or comments?
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