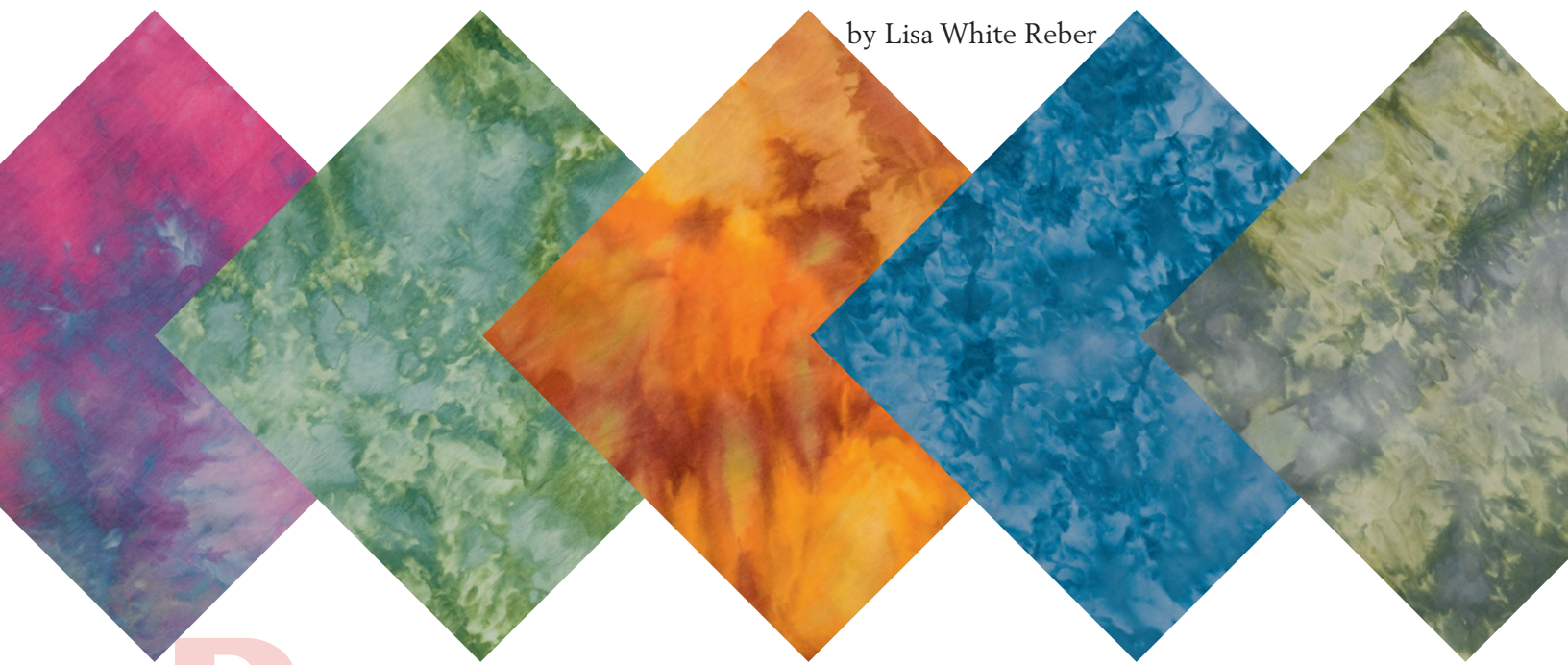


DYEING WITH SNOW AND ICE

by Lisa White Reber



Remember the days when we just couldn't wait for it to snow? That meant time to play! Snow dyeing gives quilters a chance to play with fabric, color, and snow. The basic snow-dye sandwich consists of a screen, fabric on top of the screen, snow on top of the fabric, and dye poured on top of the snow to make an enormous, inedible snow pie.

Equipment and supplies

For good snow dye results, I use a screen to keep the fabric suspended above the runoff. The simplest is a plastic tote with a double layer of tulle or

other netting clamped to the edges (photos 1, 2). Another option is a screen made with plastic needlepoint canvas set over the laundry tub (photo 3). You also need a solution of soda ash; it is what causes the dye molecules to bond with the fabric molecules. First assemble all the items needed:



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

- Good dust mask
- Rubber gloves – both dishwashing and exam type
- Laundry sink or large plastic tote
- Non-metallic screening or mesh (tulle, nylon net)
- Large binder clips or small spring clamps
- PFD (prepared for dyeing) fabric – cotton, linen, rayon, silk or a blend
 - Soda ash (sodium carbonate, not sodium bicarbonate, washing soda or baking soda)
 - Gallon bottle with a tight-fitting lid
 - Large funnel
 - Procion® MX dyes
 - Urea (nitrogen fertilizer)
 - 12 or 16 oz. bottles with tight-fitting lids or squirt tops — one for each color
 - Paper cups
 - Large buckets
 - Rags and sponges
 - Old clothes and shoes or boots
 - Fairly clean snow or ice screenings (see sidebar on page 73)
 - Synthrapol® textile detergent or liquid dishwashing soap
 - A helper (optional) and neighbors with a sense of humor

Preparations

Wearing a dust mask, measure ½ cup of soda ash into a gallon jug with a funnel. Fill the jug halfway with warm water, close tightly, and shake

well. Then fill to the top with water and shake again. Next, put the fabric you plan to dye into a clean bucket or dishpan, and pour the soda ash solution over it. Wearing gloves, squeeze the solution through the fabric, and set it aside to soak for at least 20 minutes while mixing the dyes.

Now it's time to mix the colors. When working with dye powders, you should always wear a dust mask and gloves, and work away from the fabric soaking in the soda solution in case of splashes. Because snow dyeing is naturally unpredictable and very forgiving, accuracy is not super-critical. The easiest method is to use one tablespoon each of urea and dye powder to one cup of warm water. With the funnel, pour the dye powder and urea into a bottle, add half of the water, cap tightly, and shake well. When no lumps of dye remain, add the rest of the water and shake again. Wash and dry the funnel between colors. Clean up the work area, and let the dye solutions cool so that when you use it the snow won't melt too fast. These dye solutions will be usable for about a week if stored at room temperature, longer if they are kept cool.

Now, wearing long gloves, squeeze out the fabric and arrange it on the screen-topped tote. Save the excess soda solution—it can be reused until

it's gone; shake before each use. The actual arranging of the fabric depends on the size of the fabric and of your screen. Just crumple it up into hills and valleys so that all the fabric is on the screen with room all around for the snow (photo 4). More tightly crumpled fabric can give more undyed white areas.



Photo 4

Time for snow

Shovel enough reasonably clean snow to fill a five-gallon bucket and bring it indoors to your work space. (The neighbors thought my long-suffering husband was out of his mind for bringing snow into the house—until they saw the gorgeous fabric.) Using gloved hands or a trowel, cover the fabric with a snow layer about 2" thick. With fluffier snow, use more. *Tip: Leaves, twigs, and general dirt in the snow aren't a big problem—the fabric will get several washes.* Make sure the

edges and corners of the fabric are well covered.

Finally it's time to add color. You can squirt, pour, drip, or dribble—anything goes (photo 5). Shake the dye solutions before pouring for best results. I mix colors in white cups from a discount store and pour from a spout pinched in one edge. Squirt bottles work well, or you can pour directly from your dye stock. Compare fabric dyed with separate colors (photo 6) to fabric dyed with colors mixed in the cup (photo 7).



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7

For the darkest results, use lots of dye. The darkest fabrics took $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups (14 fluid ounces, or 410 ml) to dye four yards, or about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup per yard. Blues are a problem, especially turquoise, which prefers the warmest conditions of all the MX dyes. For that reason, I have never worked with turquoise and snow together until this article. As expected, the blue areas are pale (photo 8).



Photo 8

Final steps

Now comes the hard part—waiting for the ice to melt. When most of the snow is gone (about six hours) and what remains is largely white again, it's time to start cleaning up. Wearing gloves, flip the fabric pile over so any remaining snow falls into the tub below (photo 9).

Set the fabric aside in a dishpan and rinse off the screen and container. Now use cool water to rinse out the fabric. The snow will have helped rinse away some of the dye and soda ash, but not all. If you are dyeing small pieces of fabric, you can do all the washing out by hand; to save water and work, let the fabric soak at each stage. After one or two cool rinses, very little color should show in the water, so you can move to a warm wash with liquid dish soap like Ivory or Palmolive. *Tip: Don't mix different-colored fabrics at this time to avoid back-staining light areas.* After a warm wash and rinse, move to hot (140°F) wash temperatures and warm rinses. A textile soap like Synthrapol or liquid dish soap will work with the hot washout. If your washing machine has one, use the sanitary cycle. ♦



Photo 9

Resources:

Dyes, soda ash, urea, fabric & clothing, instruction sheets
www.DippyDyes.com
www.ProChemical.com
www.DharmaTrading.com

Snowless?

Ice dyeing also produces great results. Courtesy of our local packaged ice manufacturing facility, I brought home “screenings”—the small chips of ice left behind when bags are filled with ice cubes. If they aren’t sifted out, the bagged ice product ends up freezing into a big useless lump. The plant sells some to a fish market and a produce seller, but most of it ends up melting on the back lot of the plant. To find a retailer near you, check the phone book under ice, or go to www.PackagedIce.com and click on the Members page. They have members from all over the world listed. Bring home several five-gallon buckets full of the little chips, and proceed the same way as with snow. The main difference is that the dye trickles through it a bit faster than it does through snow. *Tip: I have also used bagged ice, but the results were quite different.*



Safety Sense



Dye powders and soda ash are extremely fine. Always wear a dust mask when working with these products. Wear gloves, old clothes, and old shoes!

Dyeing is less risky than cooking, at least in my house, but we are all more accustomed to kitchen hazards. Any tools and containers used in dyeing should not be used again for anything else. Keep pets and small children away from your work area and wipe up spills as you work. Label the dye solution bottles with the date and contents as you fill them.

If you do get soda solution on your skin, wash well with soap and water; change your clothes if they are soaked with soda solution. Also, never put soda-soaked fabric into the clothes dryer—let it line dry.