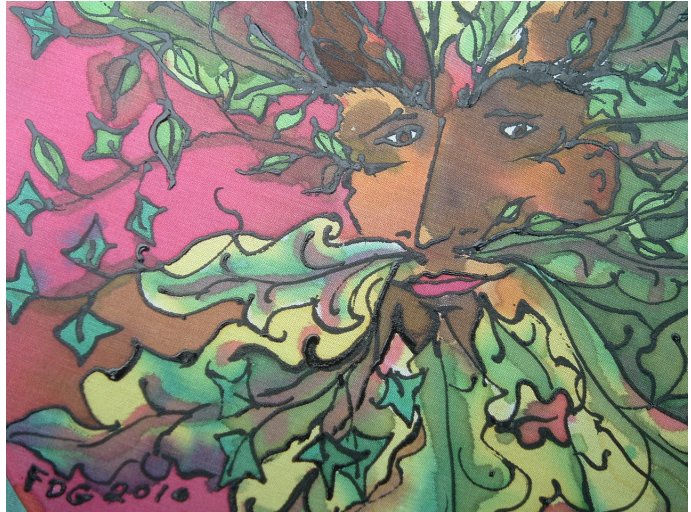


# Ten Tips for Creative Dyeing

Dye Art is about letting creativity flow. If someone thinks this article's pics don't qualify me to make dyeing suggestions, I'm happy to say I'm a relative novice. I consider that one of my qualifications to give tips. Because I am having a ball. That is what my tips are about: how to have fun and let ideas flow no matter what.

These suggestions are both for someone like me in the early exploration of dye art, or for an old hand who wants to grow creatively. Included are pics of my newbie creative triumphs, to help illustrate what trial and error has taught me about maintaining a smile and fresh ideas at all times, in hopes this'll help you enjoy dyeing as much as I do. At article's end are the supplies used for each project.



**Tip 1. Use what you have.** My dyeing started with one TeeJuice pen from a pal. I got excited about it as a calligraphy tool. Wrote a bedtime story and inked it onto a pillowcase. It's a good thing I wasn't in a pity party: I might have moaned, "Poor me. All I have is one black marker. What on earth could I possibly do with THAT?" Luckily I thought, "Wow, lemme see what I can DO with that." Otherwise, I might never have started dyed, robbing myself of its pleasures.

**Tip 2. Don't try to do it "right."** Who gets to say what's right, anyway? I don't have the skill set required to follow patterns or otherwise stick to someone else's definition of beauty. So I don't try. This usually turns out well. (I'm probably also temperamentally incapable of doing art someone else's way, and suspect that my percentage of failures is no higher than it would be if I abided by patterns and group-consensus aesthetic.) YOU say what is right for your own art. E.g., The pillowcase had white on white embroidery. I traced it, but took care not to do so slavishly. Instead I maintained my own style, as well as using the embroidery as a jumping off point for whatever I felt like drawing. For me, trying to trace "right" would've made stiff unattractive lines. I rarely do dyeing that is stenciled, traced, or otherwise copied; it is almost always my designs. This is partially out of necessity!

**Tip 3. If your initial work on a piece looks awful, keep going anyway.** My first attempt to paint silk was a disaster. I tried a scarf. It has cardboard stuck to the resist in back and blobs of resist everywhere. It will NOT be sold at Sak's. But I love my beautiful mess.

Not at first, though. I started by applying resist all wrong to the white scarf. And saw NO redeeming value in the mess I'd made. But I kept going, because silk costs

money. This had two benefits. Assuming the scarf was ruined, I was free to continue my first silk painting, just to learn. I learn best by doing. Two: I ended up loving the scarf's design and stunning Green Label Silk Dyes colors. My beautiful mess adorned a table at a recent event. It cheered me throughout the day.

New at dyeing, I'm not new at creative endeavors. (The trial 'n' error lessons herein were by and large learned long ago, as a musician and poet. Mostly, I'm just having to remember them for dyeing.) Initial stages may make a poem, song, dance, silk painting, (fill in the blank) seem doomed, but if you keep at it, something fabulous can blossom.



**Tip 4. If a piece doesn't work out, don't throw it away. Add to it instead.**

Maybe it just doesn't look right YET. Start adding to it. Add color. Or add something to a larger portion of the blank than you already have. (Blanks are plain surfaces you dye, such as a scarf or tee-shirt.) Add tiny shapes between big shapes you've already made. Add bigger shapes. Blur some of the dye. Perhaps KEEP on adding. Play. Next comes another approach for a project that doesn't work out:



**Tip 5. Don't toss a failed project.**

**Let it sit a while.** I had an idea: Give a silk scarf broad sweeps of autumn colors, then draw fall leaves over it with TeeJuice. So I tried tie-dye for the first time, hoping for tie-dye high couture. It came out more tie-dye high hippie.

The scarf sat for a week, while I went ahead with other projects. Luckily, I hadn't set the dye (I'd used Green Label Silk Dyes colors). One day, I wrapped up a project and had a bit of dye left. I figured, "What the heck," reached for the scarf, and dipped its ends into the dye. Pretty! Over the next few days, there was leftover dye a few more times. I dipped parts of the scarf I didn't like into it. This blurred colors and lines, improving the tie dye patterns. Now the scarf has the autumnal background I want.

Letting a disappointing project sit awhile gives solutions the chance to bubble up from

your subconscious. Or you might happen on an article that solves your problem. Take a break from a troublesome undertaking, and there are a million ways the right answer might just come along.





**Tip 6. Go with the flow.** Confettijulie told me recently that dyeing is an inexact art. You can't predict the results. I've found this to be true of any art form. You have to work around mistakes and surprises. They can be guideposts instead of roadblocks. Mistakes often become the best part of a design. These sneakers are an attempt at damage control. I made white sneakers pink with Green Label Silk Dye. Apparently, it is not for dyeing cotton. Confettijulie does that with great results. However, I painted TeeJuice leaves to cover my blotchy uneven dye job. Wearing my new sneaks will make me smile. Going with the flow, seeing mistakes and surprises as design elements, can produce amazing results. Art is a roller coaster ride. Let go and lean into the curves.

**Tip 7. Try different dyes.**

I ADORE TeeJuice. Among other things, it is helping me realize that I can draw! (This is a huge realization for me. Happy me!) Try different types of dyes because one of them might be the exact thing you need to free your inner artist.



**Tip 8. Choose the right dye for the job.**

TeeJuice is my favorite, but I need a more fluid medium for some projects. Using TeeJuice for them will make it impossible to accomplish what I envision. More important, it might leave me thinking that the reason I can't execute the project is that I am just a crummy artist, inherently lacking any skill needed.

I am going to try Dye-Na-Flow. I heard it flows more than TeeJuice and less than Green Label Dyes, which are too loose for the project at hand. (You can dilute TeeJuice, but it won't set if you use more than one part water to three parts TeeJuice. Being sure I dilute no more than 25% is too distracting for me when I paint.) But how do you know the right dye for your project? Read the next tip.

**Tip 9. Ask how-to questions.**

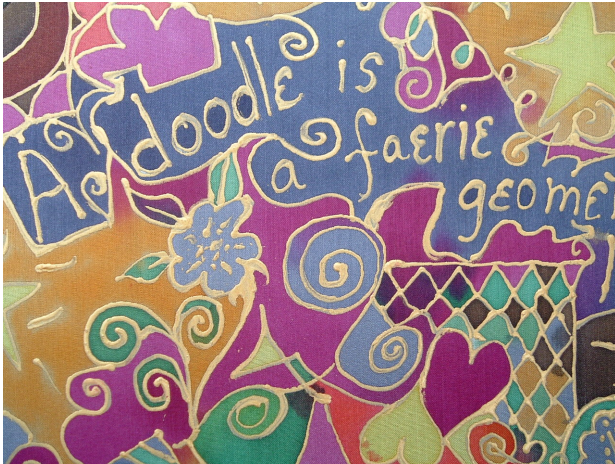
I found two friends who are skilled fabric artisans (their respective sites are [www.confettijulie.etsy.com](http://www.confettijulie.etsy.com) and [floraspond.etsy.com](http://floraspond.etsy.com)). They've shaved endless hours off my learning curve and forestalled major frustration. Read up on dyeing, but there's no substitute for picking the brain of a person who has years of experience. Or a beginner might happen to know the exact info you lack. If you don't have dye-buddies, check out the Jacquard forum at

<http://www.jacquardproducts.com/forums/> where a plethora of know-how is available for the asking.

**Tip 10. Use the best supplies you can afford. Otherwise, you might think your artistry is lacking** when, in fact, your tools aren't up to snuff. (This closing tip contradicts the first one. Go figure.) I did my first TeeJuice drawing on quality vintage cloth. Later, I made a similar effort on cheap muslin. The latter drawing looks so poor that, had I done the muslin first, I would never have known what I was capable of. I would have thought I didn't have the artistic aptitude needed and maybe never dyed again. Net result would've been the loss of a lot of pleasure and self-expression. The belief that you completely lack skill or even potential for art can be devastating if you long to be creative. But poor tools can leave you thinking that trying to develop skill is a waste of time in your case. Spare yourself. This tip was hard won. Though I was considered "artistic" in the visual arts as a child, my folks didn't know enough to buy me art supplies. I grew up in a neighborhood where none of us had them. Using good dyes and blanks has helped teach me I am more capable at visual arts than I had thought. Now, I can't wait to see where my fabric art adventure will go.

### **Enjoy dyeing to the max: Let dye, fun, and creativity flow!**

**Outlaw Bunny** taught herself to play guitar at age fourteen, then immediately started performing in a major metropolitan area's clubs. She's toured the U.S., released a best-selling music album, and taught creative process to newbies and pros in a variety of artistic fields. She believes we're all skilled artists, given the right genre and right support. When Multiple Sclerosis made holding a guitar too difficult, she took up mandolin, and plays tunes not in its usual repertoire. Her focus also shifted to freeform three-dimensional bead-weaving.  
[www.outlawbunny.etsy.com](http://www.outlawbunny.etsy.com) and [www.outlawbunny.com](http://www.outlawbunny.com)



The supplies below (except for pillowcase and sneakers) can be found through [www.jacquardproducts.com](http://www.jacquardproducts.com) or 800-442-0455.

- 1) Top photo: detail from silk painting of foliate face on 9&1/2" silk hoop, using Green Label Silk Dyes and Black Waterbased Resist
- 2) My Beautiful Mess: silk scarf with Green Label Silk Dyes and Black Waterbased Resist
- 3) Autumnal Silk scarf: Green Label Silk Dyes and TeeJuice
- 4) Tennis sneakers rescued by TeeJuice
- 5) TeeJuice on Pillowcase
- 6) Detail of silk painting on a 9&1/2' silk hoop: Green Label Silk Dyes and Gold Waterbased Resist