

Silk Veils

By Loretta (former Feshie)

No other fabric moves quite like silk. A silk veil can either be a dramatic accent to your belly dance costume or act as your partner in the dance: it's up to you. Either way, the possible range of colors and designs in hand-dyed silk veils is endless.

As delicate as silk appears, it's really surprisingly easy to work with. I use 6 mm china silk (habotai), 45" wide, but if you prefer a slightly heavier silk, 8 mm also works well.

To prepare your veil for dying, first cut a three-yard length of the silk (some dancers are able to whip around 4 yards, but it is difficult to do, for all that the extra fabric is dynamic). Hand wash it in hot water with a little gentle detergent and rinse it well. I use a few drops of Dove dishwashing liquid. This removes any sizing in the fabric and gets it ready to accept the dye. I use acid dyes that are made especially for silk and nylon. They are easy to work with and the colors react quickly and are permanent (see our Dharma Trading Co link on our resources page for both the dye and the silk).

To dye a solid color veil, dissolve the dye in about two gallons of very hot water. Wear rubber gloves! I heat the water on the stove until it is almost boiling. Make sure all the dye is dissolved, or you'll end up with darker spots on the veil. Immerse the fabric completely in the dye solution and stir constantly for about ten minutes so that the color comes out even. Remove fabric from the dye and add one cup of white vinegar to the dye solution. Stir and re-immerses the fabric. Stir for about three minutes, remove the fabric and rinse it in cold water until the water runs clear (or almost clear).

I then hang my veils outside on the clothesline—they dry very quickly. I hand roll the hems and iron with a warm iron.

An effect that is similar to tie-dye but softer and subtler is the plastic bag method. Use a one gallon size zip lock bag. Fill it halfway with the dye solution and 1/3 cup white vinegar. Squeeze the wet fabric into a ball and immerse it in the plastic bag, leaving it sit for ten minutes without disturbing it. Remove the fabric without unfolding it. Then rinse it until the water runs clear. You can leave it as it is for now, which will be a color on a white background, or you can squeeze the fabric into a ball again and immerse it into another color dye solution. Almost any two color combinations work, from a delicate light blue on white for a cloudlike effect to a green on royal blue for a watery effect.

A third method that is more time-consuming but is really lovely is the blend. A blend starts out at the top of the veil with a very light shade and gradually deepens in color until the bottom of the veil. I start with two gallons of very hot water tinted to a light shade, and immerse the entire veil. Stir it for a few minutes and then gather the veil lengthwise about six inches from the top using a rubber band to hold it. Remove the fabric and add a little more dye, stirring well. Re-immerses the fabric all except the six inches. Stir for a few minutes, remove the veil and lower the rubber band by another six inches. Add more dye, stir, re-immerses the veil except for the twelve inches held by the rubber band. Keep doing this until the entire veil is dyed. I find that the best colors for this blended effect are pale pink to hot pink, light blue to royal blue, pale purple to deep purple, pale gold to deep gold, and pale gray to deep gray.

A very dramatic effect is achieved by dying the center of the veil one color and the ends a different color. To do this you gather each end of the veil about eighteen inches from the end and secure with a rubber band. Dye the center first by holding the ends out of the dye solution. Then dye the ends in a different color dye solution.

It's possible to dye silk with home-made organic dyes; however, the silk must be treated first so that it will take the dye, and the materials used for the pre-treatment are often more toxic than an acid dye. However, I've dyed silk a lovely peachy-flesh color by boiling the outer skins of yellow onions and adding some white vinegar. The white vinegar does two things: it intensifies the color and sets it. The effects you can achieve are really only limited by your imagination. Even your "worst" mistakes can end up looking beautiful. Don't be afraid to experiment!

