

Foxtail Community Farm Guide to Natural Dyes for Brown Eggs

You can dye brown eggs? Yes! We've done so every Easter since we started raising chickens. I find the colors to be deeper and more “earthy” than the same dye on white eggs.

While you're at it, why not make your own natural dyes? It's fun, interesting, gratifying and more sustainable than using chemical food coloring. And it's not difficult, it just requires time and patience.

First, hard boil your eggs. It is definitely true that slightly older eggs (1 week+) will be easier to peel once boiled, because the egg starts to shrink away from the shell as it ages. Beyond that, everyone seems to have their own “foolproof” method for making the perfect hard-boiled egg, so go with that.

Next, assemble your containers and ingredients. You'll need a container for each dye color you're making, plus extras for straining/transferring the dye. I use empty mason jars since I have hundreds of them. You can use whatever heatproof cups or bowls are handy. Brown eggs need to sit in the dye for a long time, so choose containers that are large enough to hold a few eggs at once, won't disintegrate and won't be needed for something else (like your morning coffee). You'll also need a strainer, spoons, a drying rack, boiling water, plain white vinegar and ingredients of choice from chart below.

In each dye container, combine **natural ingredients of choice from chart + 1 cup boiling water + 1 tbs white vinegar**. Stir gently to combine. Then let this sit to steep for at least an hour. Go find something else to do so you won't get impatient and rush the process. When you're satisfied, strain and reserve the colored liquid.

These ingredients...	...make:
Yellow onion skins (~1 cup packed)	peachy orange
Red onion skins (~1 cup packed)	purplish to reddish
Red cabbage (~1/4 cup chopped)	light to darker blue or green, depending on shell color
Turmeric (1 tbs ground)	yellow to gold
Red cabbage (1/4 cup) + Turmeric (1 tsp)	lime to deeper green (it looks weird, but it works!)
Red beets (1/4 cup shredded packed)	pink to maroon
Coffee (1 cup brewed – omit extra water)	brown
Grape Juice (1 cup – omit extra water)	lavender

Other ideas I've read about but not yet tried include: blueberries (blue), red zinger tea (lavender), cherry juice (red), boiled carrot tops (yellow), chamomile or green tea (yellow), paprika or chili powder (orange), boiled yellow or green apple peels (yellowish-green).

Gently lower eggs into the dye containers. Make sure your hands are not greasy and use the spoons to minimize handling the eggs. Now let those eggs sit! For brown eggs in natural dyes, we are talking at least 1 hour and up to overnight. Check them as often as you like; try different dyeing times for varied shades. When they are done, use your spoons to gently remove, pat dry with paper or cloth towels and place on a drying rack. Let air dry completely before refrigerating.