



WRITING SAMPLE

Publication: NaturallyCurly.com

Publish date: March 2018

How to Color Your Hair Using Indigo

By Gretchen Heber

Curlies looking for a chemical-free color change often look to henna, which imparts an attractive red-brown hue to locks. Curlies looking for a darker cast, on the other hand, might add indigo to their coloring regimen for a darker color.

This natural hair color is derived from plants, often *Indigofera tinctoria* or *Indigofera suffruticosa*, shrubby members of the bean family that are native to tropical and subtropical parts of the world.

"If chemicals aren't your thing, you should definitely consider henna and indigo," says Khadija Carryl, founder of online henna boutique Henna Sooq, and henna and natural hair care expert.

Indigo has been used for centuries to dye not only hair but also fabric. The fabric and clothing industry now largely uses synthetic dyes, but synthetic indigo cannot be used to dye hair because it contains ingredients that can damage hair and skin.

That's not to say, however, that every hair dye indigo on the market is free from additives. If you're shopping for natural hair colorants, be sure to check labels carefully, cautions Carryl, who teaches at various henna events around the country. Some may contain chemical additives.

One Step or Two?

Almost always, an indigo treatment is done in conjunction with a henna treatment. Indigo alone can impart unpredictably bright and typically not desirable colors, such as green, purple or bright blue, depending on the base hair color.

Most natural dye adherents do either a one-step mixture of henna and indigo or a two-step process wherein henna is applied first and then the darker color is applied in a separate step.

"It depends on what color you're going for," says Carryl. "If you're looking for a reddish brown, you can do the one-step process and mix your proportions based on the exact shade you're looking for."

For example, a 60% henna/40% indigo mix would result in a redder hue than a 40%/60% mix, Carryl explains. "You have to do a little math to get the right color," she says. "It can be kind of a trial and error process."

If you're going for pure black hair, she says, "The two-step is the only way to get true black."

In fact, if deep black is what you're after, Carryl suggests adding a little indigo to the "henna" step, to create a darker base. "If you make the base darker to begin with, you'll have better luck with the indigo step," she says.

Furthermore, doing henna in a separate step can also help the indigo "stick" better, Carryl says.

Whichever method you decide is right for you, it's important that you do a patch test first, cautions Carryl. "Some people are allergic to natural plant products, so it's important to test for any reactions first," she says.

Getting Started

Before you get started, you'll want to have some supplies on hand:

- Henna and indigo powders. You'll want about 100g of powder for every 6 inches of hair.
- Rubber gloves
- Two non-reactive bowls
- Petroleum jelly (like Vaseline) or Shea butter
- Plastic spoon
- Newspapers or towels
- Hair color brush (optional)
- Plastic cap or plastic wrap
- An old shirt to wear — one you don't mind getting stained.

Two-Step Henna-Indigo Process

Henna

[Read this article](#) to learn how to apply henna to your hair.

Indigo

You can do this step immediately following the henna step, or up to 72 hours later.

1. Prepare an area to do your coloring. Lay down newspapers or old towels on the countertop, sink and floor where you'll be working. Alternatively, some people do the dying process in the shower to minimize the mess. Keep in mind that the dye will stain clothes and towels.
2. Shampoo your hair, if you like. Some curlies apply the mixture to dry hair.
3. Section your hair. Clip each section in place.
4. Apply petroleum jelly or Shea butter to your hairline and ears to prevent the dye from staining your skin.
5. Prepare the mixture. Put the powder in a bowl and slowly add warm distilled water until a yogurt-like consistency is formed. Don't add a lot of water all at once or your mixture will be too runny. If your mixture ends up too loose, you can add a thickener (see below). Allow the indigo to rest about 20 minutes before using.
6. Stir mixture and apply to hair, section by section. Most people use their gloved hands, but others use a brush.
7. Don a plastic cap or wrap hair in plastic wrap and let sit for 3 to 4 hours. Some curlies allow the dye to remain on their hair overnight.
8. Thoroughly rinse the paste out of your hair using cool water. Some curlies apply a conditioner on top of the coloring paste right before they rinse — they say it makes rinsing easier.

One-Step Henna-Indigo Process

1. Mix henna and allow it to sit for 8-12 hours to release the dye.
2. When the henna is ready to use, move on to the next steps.
3. Shampoo your hair, if you like. Some curlies apply the mixture to dry hair.
4. Section your hair. Clip each section in place.
5. Apply petroleum jelly or shea butter to your hairline and ears to prevent the dye from staining your skin.

6. Prepare an area to do your coloring. Lay down newspapers or old towels on the countertop, sink, and floor where you'll be working. Alternatively, some people do the dyeing process in the shower to minimize the mess. Keep in mind that the dye will stain clothes and towels.
7. Prepare the indigo. Put the powder in a bowl and slowly add warm distilled water until a paste is formed. Don't add a lot of water all at once or your mixture will be too runny. If your mixture ends up too loose, you can add a thickener (see below). Allow the indigo to rest about 20 minutes before using.
8. Mix the two pastes together.
9. Apply to hair, section by section. Most people use their gloved hands, but others use a brush.
10. Don a plastic cap or wrap hair in plastic wrap and let sit for at least 3-4 hours. Some curlies allow the dye to remain on their hair overnight.
11. Thoroughly rinse the paste out of your hair using cool water. Some curlies apply a conditioner on top of the coloring paste right before they rinse — they say it makes rinsing easier.

Thickening the Mixture

Even if you're careful when adding water to your indigo powder, the mixture can end up runny, so many experts proactively add a thickening agent to the powder. It's important to add the thickener to the powder, before you add water. Adding it later in the process can cause a lumpy mess, according to CurlTalker Bomega, who has spent many years researching and using natural hair dyes.

One option is carboxymethyl cellulose, commonly referred to as CMC or cellulose gum, a nontoxic thickening agent available for purchase in powder form. Use 1 gram of CMC per 100 grams of colorant powder. Another option for thickening colorant mixtures is powdered pudding mix — about a teaspoon per 100 grams of indigo. Some curlies use vanilla pudding mix so they can enjoy the nice scent.

Yet another option is touted by CurlTalker ButterCurl, who suggests instead adding glucomannan powder into your mixture. Glucomannan is a dietary fiber usually made from the root of the tropical konjac (*Amorphophallus konjac*) plant. In foods, glucomannan is used as a thickener or gelling agent.

"My indigo was very smooth and non-crumbly. It went on great and didn't affect the color," says ButterCurl.

Other natural hair coloring devotees use xanthum gum or cornstarch as thickeners.

Other Additives

Some natural hair dye users saying adding salt to the mixture helps the hair accept the dye better, but some CurlTalkers say this trick does not work for them. So it may be a case-by-case thing.

Bomega has another tip for increasing coverage: "I discovered (that) cutting the indigo either with shikakai or with fine ground mica powder actually helped me get better coverage — and saves me money."

You may see recipes online that suggest adding coconut milk, oils, conditioner, honey, egg, yogurt, etc. to your natural hair color mixture, but know that if you use these, they can lessen the saturation of the colorant. "It depends on what your focus is. If you're looking for just a hint of color, it's ok to add any of these," says Carryl.

Some women with curly hair add amla to their color mixes, says Carryl. "It's good to add to the recipe to maintain curls," she says. Amla is another name for Indian gooseberry (*Embolica officinalis* Gaertn), a small tree native to Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and southern China. "In fact, amla is often used separately to encourage hair growth," Carryl adds.

Yet another additive often added to natural hair dye mixes is aloe vera powder, which can alleviate drying, according to Carryl.

Fading

Indigo fades. How fast seems to vary from person to person, but know that this colorant does fade.

"I just accept fading as part of the process," says Bomega. "I normally just color the roots every 2-3 weeks and I find that the first time around, the indigo is considerably faded after 2 weeks, but then when I re-apply for the new round of roots, the last 1/4-1/2 inch that was faded gets covered permanently."

You'll just have to see how much your color treatment fades and re-color accordingly.

Ready to Try Indigo?

We hope you have enough information now to achieve the dark brown or black hair of your dreams using indigo hair dye.

And once you've colored your hair, be sure to share your experience over in the Coloring Your Hair section of [CurlTalk!](#) We can't wait to see your new look!