
Dip-Dye Ombre Napkins with Kelly Wilkinson

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

Ombre is still having a really big moment these days. You can see the dip-dyed light-to-dark effect on all things, from clothes to bedding to pillowcases. As the name implies-- dip dye-- it's a really straightforward thing to do. You're taking something, and you are dipping it into a big pot of dye, so you're getting this lovely gradient effect. We're going to do this on napkins. So this is some perfect DIY decor. And then after we dip dye the napkins, if you're still feeling ambitious, I'm going to show you how to cut really simple stencils that you can add some designs to the very edges of your napkins.

Chapter 2 - Materials

Materials

Here is what you're going to need. You're going to need the napkins that you want to dye. They should be a natural material, cotton, linen. And you should wash and dry them before you start dying them because sometimes when things are manufactured and you buy them from the store they have a kind of coating on them that prevents the dye from really being absorbed. So you want to just make sure that you've washed and dried them before you start dying. You're going to need your dye. There's a lot of different kinds of dyes on the market. I like to use the liquid dye because it dissolves really beautifully in the hot water. There's a lot of powder dyes and those work perfectly fine as well, you just really have to make sure when you get to the point of dissolving the dye in the hot water that you stir it really well. Because if you think of sometimes making hot chocolate and stirring the powder and you come across those little pockets where the powder hasn't dissolved, powdered dye can be like that in your dye bath and that will give you kind of streaks and blotches on your project. So you can use those for sure and they really work, but you want to make sure that it's really well dissolved when you get to that part. You need some kind of tool to stir everything up together. This is obviously something that will become dyed so you should not go on to use this when you're cooking in the kitchen. A scrap of fabric to test your dye color on and keep things tidy. The paper towel is for that as well. You'll need salt to add into your dye bath, a pair of kitchen gloves you should use when you're dying. I actually don't use them but you should. They'll prevent your hands from turning all kinds of funky colors. You'll need a pot to dye in and it needs to be big enough that when you dunk it to dye in it fits the width of your napkin. So I'm using this roasting pan here. You also need access to a sink to rinse your napkins out and then eventually you're going to string them up to dry and then put them in the tumble dryer so you'll need that as well. If you're going to stencil the napkins at the end you need a extra couple few things. To cut the stencils I use Mylar. You can use acetate or others stencil material that you can find in the craft store, but I like Mylar and I'll talk more about that when we get to that point. You need textile paint, an Exacto knife, a stencil brush, and then various craft supplies for cutting out your stencils like scissors, a hole punch, pencil to draw with, painter's tape, and a paper plate to pour your paint into. And you should be wearing a grubby, or as my mom likes to say, "grundunny" shirt that you don't mind getting some dye on.

Chapter 3 - Dye Napkins

Dye napkins

First, we need to make up the dye bath. And so you want a big pot of hot water, which I have here already, and you want to fill it with enough water that when you dump the napkin in, you can go in and out without having to push some of the napkin down. So you want it to be as high as you want to dye to be. So I've probably got a good three or four inches of water in the pot. And then we want to add the salt. Even if your particular brand of dye doesn't call for adding the salt, I recommend that you add salt anyway, because through the magic of chemistry, salt allows the fabric to absorb more dye. So it will give you a more saturated color. So I'm going to add a cup of salt to my dye bath. You don't need really precise measurements. You just want to make sure that you have enough salt in there that it will help the dye to set into the fabric. And a cup is usually pretty good. Then it's time to mix the colors that you want. You can use a straight color and not mix two together, but I'm going to use a purple color and a blue color. I feel like adding the blue adds this kind of nice depth to the purple, and just gives it this nicer hue. So I'm going to start with my purple, and I'm going to add probably about a quarter to a half of the bottle. And then I'm going to toss in a little bit less of the blue, maybe a third. And I'm going to test this out on my scrap of fabric, and you should too. I mean you can mix up these custom colors, and then just dunk a corner of something in, and make sure that it's the color that you want. As you can see here, it's steamy. I'm keeping this on a simmer. And again, this is something that I've learned through trying different kinds of dyeing. Even if your dye doesn't call for it to use a hot water method, a stove top method, I really recommended it. It sets the color better. You just want to keep it at a simmer, and you don't want it to boil. And now I'm going to test and see if it's a color I like. And just dip it right in. And you can see it's purple, but it has some blue. When you mix colors together, sometimes the blue-- or the lighter color-- ends up almost on top, which is something I really like. So I'm going to go for that. One thing you want to think about before you dip your napkin in is how high you want it to go up. When I fold these and put them on the table, I like the whole entire ombre gradient to show on this front of the napkin, so I'm only going up a few inches. If you want to cover much more of your napkin, that's completely fine. Just give that thought before you actually dunk it in, because you obviously can't take the dye out. You want to make sure you don't have any tags on your napkin, and then take it over to the sink and get it wet. All right. So we are ready to dunk. And the first dip in is going to be your lightest color, so you just want to go in and out. And then the next one, you're just going to go straight in, but bring it not quite as high. And you want to bounce it around a little bit, kind of keep it moving and keep it swishy, because you don't want to get any hard lines. So this ombre effect is just you're going to dunk it a little bit higher each time. So it's moving from light to dark. And then at the bottom, you want to be really saturated, very supersaturated, so that one I keep in the longest, and I just want to have it hang out there for probably a minute total. And the reason, as you can probably tell, that you have this lovely gradient effect, is because the top stays really pristine and give this great contrast to the dye at the bottom. And you want to keep it that way. You don't want to get drips or splatters on it. So as we're going to make a beeline over to the sink, you just want to be really careful in how you're holding this and carrying it, keeping the color at the bottom at all times as you move over and rinse it out. And then you're going to run it under cold water to rinse the dye out. You want to rinse it out really thoroughly, and you can do that by opening up the seams, because that's where the dye likes to hang out a little bit. And just keep rinsing, and keep rinsing. This is almost the hardest part-- which sounds sort of dumb to say, because you're just rinsing it out-- but you just want to do a really thorough job of this. And I'll show you this nifty sort of thing that I came up that it allows you to make sure that the dye is actually all

out. So once the water is running really clear, what I do, since I'm normally dyeing a few napkins at once, is I set this one up in some paper towels here. It'll look like the water is running clear, but then you want to lay it here to dry, because if they're still dye left, you'll be able to see it in the paper towel. Before you dye the next napkin, you want to make sure that when you were lifting the napkin up and down, you didn't get any splatters-- well, you probably did get splatters, but you want to take care of the splatters that you made around the inside of the pan. So I'm just going to take a paper towel and run it around here. Because if you hit those areas with your new napkin, it will ruin it, if it's a part of the napkin that you don't want to be dyed. So I do that between every napkin or item that I am dyeing, to make sure that it stays nice and pristine. You can see that this one is releasing some of its dye yet, it hasn't all been rinsed out. So that means you want to give it yet another rinse. And you are using a lot of water, it's true, but you can just take shorter showers for a week or so to compensate for all the water that you're using. This step sort of seems like a pain, like you are doing this an awful lot. And you are. It's true. But the reason that you're doing it an awful lot is because you want to have this release all of its dye now in the sink, rather than later. Because the first time you wash it, it will turn lighter-- but not only that, it could also give the whole napkin a tint of this color when you put it through the washing machine the first time, and you want to avoid that. At this point, you're really trying to lock in all of this color as much as possible. So you want to rinse it again, and do this until there's no more dye coming out on your paper towel. And at that point, you're ready to hang it up and let it dry. Now, I have done this every which way, in terms of drying these, and I've put them straight into the washing machine. I've put them straight into the dryer. And the best possible thing is to let these air dry. So you want to hang them up on a-- rig up a clothes line over the heater in your house, or hang them up outside. And you want to line them all up and let them air dry until they are barely damp to the touch, and that will give you the very best locked-in ombre color.

Add stencils

Now we're at the part where I'm going to show you how to add a really simple design to your napkins. I'm going to do a simple triangle geometric design, and then I'll show you some different options of other stencils that you can cut. I think it's really nice, even if it's a very simple stencil, to add your own sense of style or design to these ombre napkins that you've made. I like to use mylar, which you can get from the art supply store. You can also find stencil blanks at different crafts stores. I like the frosted mylar, so it has this-- it's the sort of foggy mylar instead of the clear-- because when you cut your design and put it over what you're stenciling, you can actually see it much more clearly. So you just want to cut a piece of mylar. You don't need to be fussy about this at all. I'm going to use this gridded mat to help me draw the triangles here. So I'm just going to do a row that is half of one of these little squares, and skooch it up, and draw the next ones. As you can see, I'm not being very precise about this. I like them being a little, I don't know, funky shape. So I'm going to do three up and two across here. Draw this in pencil and then you cut it out. You can be, I mean if you want to be super straight about this, you can use a ruler to make sure that you have really clear edges, clean edges. But I like it to feel-- I like it to feel handmade. I mean, that's what we're doing here. So I don't get too in a bother about this being really perfect. And then you take your X-Acto knife and then cut these guys out. You want to make sure that you have a very sharp blade on here because you want these cutouts to be as clean and precise as possible. You can go back after you cut them out and cut out if there's any little snaggy areas, because this is where you're going to be putting the paint. You want these to be really precise cuts, and give yourself a

nice straight line. It's best to look at it from behind a lot of times to make sure that it looks really clean. And that is great. That one is ready to go. You want to figure out where you want the design to land when the napkin is folded up and laying on the table. You just need to keep that in mind when you're figuring out where you're going to stencil. I like it to be in this area, this sort of bottom left area, once the napkin is folded up. So take note of that position and figure out where that should be on the unstenciled napkin. You can sort of finger press this so you can see more clearly when you open it where you're going to be stenciling. And when I open it up, I want it to be right there. You want the tape to be keeping the stencil flat on your napkin, because you don't want the paint to get up and under the stencil. We're also going to use our fingers to help keep that down. Let me just talk to you about the kind of paint you're going to use, and loading up the paint on your brush. I have textile ink in a metallic gold that I'm going to use, and we're going to pour some into a paper plate. So you need more than you think, because the thing about stenciling is you want to have it really loaded up on your brush. So this might seem like you're wasting some, but load up a lot of paint on your stenciling brush. You want to definitely be using a stenciling brush because you want these bristles to be very rigid. And then you're going to tap off the excess. And that's how you properly load up your stenciling brush. Press your stencil down as you apply, and you want to go straight up and down. You do not want to go under to the side because some of the paint could leak, could squish under the stencil here. All right. Then time for the reveal. Peel it off very carefully. Make sure you don't have any paint on your fingers at this point, because you're going to be touching the napkin. You peel this back nice and slowly, and we have our first design here, which I think looks really cool-- that gold on the purple-- looks very kind of regal. At this point, you can create more, you can design repeats here, you can flip it. Let me tell you something though. You want to make sure that this one is completely dry before you put it down again, because you don't want to get wet ink on either the back of the stencil or the back of the tape, because then as you go and use it and reuse it, you'll be marking up your napkin with paint. Even though I tend to be really loosey goosey with putting stencils on, and I'm not very precise about cutting them or actually where I'm putting them down-- I like to eyeball it and see what happens-- you do want to be really careful about the paint. So you have your paper towels nearby, keep your hands really nice and clean, and just keep checking the back of your stencil. And keep checking your hands as you're handling the stencil and as you're handling the napkin to make sure that it stays nice and pristine. So you could flip this is, as I said. You could do other designs. Let me show you a couple things here. Let that guy dry. And you can create different designs here. You can have them marching all the way across, you can flip them so they are in different places. I added a little pink one here. You do that by putting, when you apply the stencil the first time and you put this down, you tape that one off to cover it. And then you stencil the whole thing. You take the stencil off and let that stencil dry-- that part is very important. And then when you go back and re-lay your stencil down, you would tape off all of these other triangles around here. You might think, oh I could just do this really carefully, but the brush is bigger than the stencil, so you do want to be careful and tape everything off to isolate the actual elements that you want to paint. All right. Let me show you a couple other designs that you can do with mylar. You can do anything at all. I mean, you could monogram these by cutting initials into them, but with some really simple designs-- this one is the simplest of all-- you can make this party confetti polka dot napkin by using a sheet of mylar and just a hole punch. And you randomly cut out these circles and then you just apply it with one color-- being sure to let it dry, don't cover up anything that's wet-- and then when that one is completely dried you do a second color. So can see I did the pink and the gold here. You can keep doing that all over the

napkin with as many colors as you want. You could also do these kinds of swoopy little designs here across the napkin. I did that by cutting out-- I just drew freehand these loop-de-loops, and then cut it out with an X-Acto knife. You want to make sure when you're cutting it that you keep this attached. You don't want to cut all the way through or this central part will fall out. And that gives you a nice little swoopy edging of your napkin. These ones, these are some napkins that I tested with-- where the ombre didn't work so well. So I was just using them as scrap to test different designs. And I was sort of thinking about the bottom of a doily, and so I just free-handed this scallop border here, and then I cut that out entirely. So I was left with a piece like this, this very piece in fact, and then with the top part I hole-punched into every scallop there. So this is a two part stencil, and I was left with this piece. So then when you go and you apply that to the napkin, you can change the thickness between here. You just want to make sure after these have air dried to follow the manufacturer's instructions on your textile ink and heat set it, which normally means just ironing it. But be sure to read your specific instructions. So as you can see, there are so many different designs to try when you're stenciling. The very best thing to do though is just doodle. Don't worry about it. Don't be precious about it. Grab a scrap piece of paper and come up with some designs until you have something that you like. Transfer it on to the mylar, test it out on a scrap of fabric until you find that it works, and then apply it to your ombre napkins. And you have some custom printed napkins for your next dinner party.