

HENNA KIT INSTRUCTIONS

Recipes

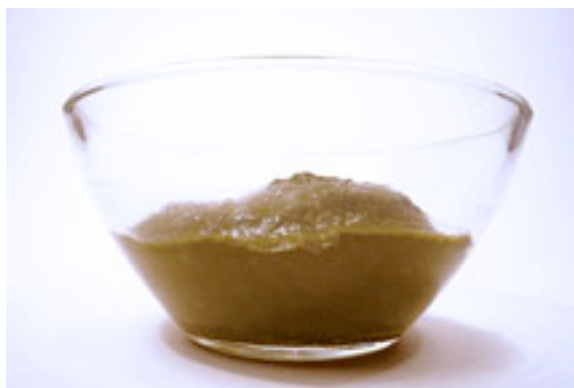
The basic process for preparing your own henna paste is as follows: 1. mix a liquid, henna powder, molasses/sugar/honey together; cover and let sit until you get dye release; 2. if you are using terpene essential oils, add them now; 3. apply paste. It is as simple as that! Below are the details and explanations that will help you master the art of henna.

You will find that the subject of recipes is one of the most hotly contested in the field of henna. My recipe is not the only one and it may or may not be the best, but through much research and experimentation I have found a mixture that works wonderfully. The most important ingredient no matter what your recipe, is good quality henna. It should be fresh and green. To avoid clogs, your henna should be finely sifted; the powder should be the consistency of talcum powder. Another very important element of a good henna recipe is experimentation; each person's skin takes the henna differently and gives a different stain. A lot depends on differences in skin thickness, body chemistry, hormone levels, amount of stress and body heat. The best way to find a recipe and method that works for you is to experiment. My recipe is essentially a Moroccan one, taught to me by a *neqasha* (henna artist) from the old section of Rabat, Morocco, and it is as follows:

Moroccan Henna Paste
fresh, green, finely sifted henna
warm water or tea
molasses, sugar or honey



In a ceramic bowl, mix the henna powder, the warm water and some molasses/sugar/honey. (the proportions should be roughly one part henna powder, 2 parts liquid and 1/2 part molasses/sugar/honey) Mix this well until it forms a paste. Continue adding a little liquid at a time and mix it in completely, until you get the consistency you want. Some say the consistency of yoghurt is best but it is better to err on the side of too thick as you can always add more liquid later. Let the henna sit at room temperature until you get "dye release". Adding a warm liquid causes a chemical reaction with the natural dye in the henna (hennotannins), "releasing" it to allow it to dye the skin; this process is called **dye release**. Read more about this below.



At this point I suggest **straining** the paste through a knee-hi stocking (the kind that is tightly woven, often called a "trouser sock") to get rid of any lumps that form from the mixing of dry and wet ingredients. I first put a plastic sandwich bag over the opening in a drinking glass which holds it upright. Then I put the stocking over the glass in the same way so that the toe of the stocking hangs down into the corner of the sandwich

bag. I then scrape the henna out of the bowl and into the stocking. Once all the paste is in, I pull the sandwich bag off the glass along with the stocking. Using the bag to keep the henna off my hands, I pull and squeeze the henna down through the stocking and into the bag while pulling the stocking out of the bag (like milking a cow very strongly). I repeat this to make sure I get everything out. Then I squeeze all the paste down to one corner of the bag and tie the bag shut with a twist-tie, snip off the corner and squeeze the paste into my bottles. If you are using cones, you can fill them from the sandwich bag of henna paste in the same way.



put a plastic sandwich bag over the opening in a drinking glass which holds it upright



put the stocking over the glass in the same way so that the toe of the stocking hangs down into the corner of the sandwich bag



scrape the henna out of the bowl and into the stocking



pull and squeeze the henna down through the stocking and into the bag while pulling the stocking out of the bag



squeeze all the paste down to one corner of the bag and tie the bag shut with a twist-tie



snip off the corner



squeeze the paste into the bottle



Voila! perfect henna paste, ready to roll!

Molasses/sugar/honey is added to change the texture of the henna; it makes the paste smoother and makes it flow a little better. It also makes the henna paste dry more slowly which will keep it from cracking and flaking off. In Morocco, rose water or orange blossom water are added to the paste for the brides' henna. This gives the paste a wonderful aroma. I also suggest adding a little bit of oil (olive oil or something similar) to the paste; this makes the paste more slippery allowing it to flow much more smoothly.

There are many who use other ingredients to their henna paste. These include fenugreek, black mustard seeds, saffron, pomegranate juice etc. I have not found any difference when using these ingredients but you can do your own experiments to see what works best for you. Some people use tea or coffee in their henna paste. but beware as the caffeine WILL get into your body through your skin. I have never noticed a difference in the color of the stain when using tea or coffee. Whenever you add something to your henna paste, consider the possibility that one of your clients or friends could have a reaction to that ingredient. It's best to keep everything very simple.

There are certain essential oils which make a difference in the color (see the section on essential oils below), but be careful because some people with sensitive skin may have a negative reaction to these oils. Again, do some side-by-side experiments with these ingredients to see what works best for you and also which fragrance you like the best.

Essential Oils Essential to the Art of Henna

There is a simple chemical constituent that is found in certain essential oils which is called **terpene**, a naturally-occurring monoterpene alcohol. These can be found in many essential oils, especially in **niaouli, tea tree, cajeput, frankincense, cardamom, eucalyptus polybracta** and **ravensara**. They oxidize the henna very quickly and effectively which brings about a deep, dark stain in a few hours. I usually leave the paste on for 4-6 hours and get a beautiful color. The disadvantage of using terpenes in your paste is that the stain may not last as long because you are not leaving the paste on the skin as long.

I usually add about 10-15 drops of essential oil for every teaspoon of henna powder when mixing my paste. I find that the paste retains its staining power longer, up to 3 or 4 days. You can also **freeze** terped paste for several months; I usually mix up a large batch, put the paste into my applicator bottles and then store the bottles of paste in the freezer for whenever I need henna paste. Thaw the paste by leaving it out at room temperature; do not heat it up in the microwave. If you are using cones, store your frozen cones in a Ziploc bag or a Tupperware container in the freezer as they can leak.

Another important aspect of henna paste-making is the time needed to achieve **dye release**; when the dye releases, the paste is at its maximum staining power. This varies for different kinds of henna. Moroccan henna usually releases its dye very quickly so you can often use it the same day you mix it; other hennas take longer (12-24 hours) so they must be mixed up earlier. When using Moroccan henna mixed with a warm liquid you will get dye release in 1-3 hours; if you mix it with a cold liquid, it will happen anywhere from 3-12 hours.

There are several ways to test for dye release. One way is to mix your henna up in a bowl and leave the bowl in a warm place. When the surface of the paste starts to turn dark green or brownish, the dye is releasing and the paste can be used. Another method is to put your paste in a plastic bag and lay it down on a piece of

paper towel. When the dye releases it will pass through the plastic and begin to stain the paper towel. Find a method that works for you and stick with it. Whether you are using terps or not, you will need to wait for dye release before you use the paste. Heat will speed up dye release so if you are in a hurry use hot liquids to mix your paste, or leave your paste in a warm room to await dye release.

One more simple mixture is needed as a fixative for the henna once the design is finished:

- Dissolve 2 teaspoons of sugar in 2 teaspoons of rose water or lemon juice
- This should be gently dabbed onto the design once the paste starts to dry, when it loses its shiny surface but before it starts to crack
- This liquid performs many tasks: it boosts the acidity of the mixture making it stain darker, it keeps the paste moist so it doesn't crack and flake off, and the sugar in the mixture makes the henna stick to your skin
- In Morocco, black pepper and garlic are also added to this mixture which are said to have a warming effect which will help to darken the stain but the smell may drive away loved ones
- There are some fixatives that are excellent for holding the henna paste in place on your skin. One of them is called New Skin which is a liquid that paints on like nail polish (and smells like it too); it is a bit difficult to remove but works great. Some people use liquid latex, spray gel or Elmer's glue mixed with lemon juice as a fixative. I also like to use a gauze tape called Hypafix that comes in several widths; it can be found at medical supply stores.

Instructions, tips, hints, tricks, etc.

What is the perfect henna experience? I believe that the ultimate result is a beautiful, dark and long-lasting design. It should be easy to prepare, enjoyable to design, easy to take care of, and be a meaningful and fun experience that you share with friends and/or clients.

Preparation:

1. prepare your paste (see above)
2. prepare your applicator
 - I use a plastic bottle with a metal applicator - used for painting on silk, tips come in various sizes (0.5, 0.7 and 0.9 mm), Jacquard brand; this applicator gives a smooth consistent line and you can pop the tip off when you are done, then close the bottle and keep the paste in the freezer for future use. The drawback of this option, is that your hand gets tired more easily; you will get used to it and experience less fatigue, but don't count on being able to do henna for hours the first time out
 - plastic cone - made from mylar wrapping paper or heavy plastic bags - instructions for rolling and filling the cone are attached; the henna flows with a gentle squeeze on the cone and the pull of gravity; this is the way it is traditionally done in India
 - syringe - this is how henna is traditionally done in Morocco - you have to find a needle with a large enough diameter to allow the henna paste to pass through, but small enough to give a fine line; I have used a glue syringe (found in an art supply store) which has a needle whose point has been cut off; the trick to using these is to push down the plunger just a little so you get a steady stream of henna paste and you don't want it to come out faster than you can draw with it; it is tough to master, but possible with some practice; the syringe is a great tool for doing long, straight lines
3. prepare the skin - it should be free of lotions, oils etc. so wash the skin to remove any residue.
4. design - here's the fun part...
 - you may feel nervous or stifled trying to draw using paste on skin; it is a strange concept and not as easy as drawing on paper, but remember that if you make a mistake, you can just wipe off the henna and start again (even a little glitch can be corrected with a toothpick)
 - practice on some part of your body that doesn't usually show; try squiggles, spirals, straight lines, diamonds, etc. until you feel comfortable



- the idea is to lay the henna onto the skin, not to draw; your applicator tip shouldn't touch the skin but hover over the skin gently letting out a string of paste which falls where you direct it (imagine that you are holding a rope and you are laying it on the ground in different shapes)
 - to steady yourself while drawing, brace your hand with your pinky, making sure not to touch the design
 - if you can't think of a design, copy something you see in a book or website; if I am going to use a design from a book I like to redraw the design first with pen and paper first so I can get a feel for how it is constructed; you can also trace a design and then recreate it in henna
 - finding designs: once you become aware you will probably start seeing henna designs everywhere you look, in decorative window gates, in embroidery, in jewelry, in tiles, in printed fabrics etc. There are many resources on the internet, specifically for henna designs, but also designs in other media which can be adapted to henna; I suggest copying the designs (even tracing them) on paper before attempting them in henna; this is a good way to unravel complicated designs making it easier when you start to do them in henna
 - you can use a temporary tattoo to give you a template on which to draw your design; designs printed on an ink jet printer can also be used as transfers; simply wet your skin with a little alcohol, press the paper, ink-side down onto your skin rubbing it for a few seconds and then remove it leaving a design over which you can henna
 - if you are a beginner, remember that arm bands and rings are difficult designs to do right - it is hard getting the two ends of the band to meet perfectly; start with simple, small designs like little medallions (if you want to try bracelets, trace the shape first with an eyeliner pencil to make sure your lines meet)
 - henna designs come out darker and last longer on the palms of the hand and the soles of the feet, so if you are practicing, try another area of the body so that if you don't like the design it won't last too long and you can try again
 - if you don't want orange nails for the next 3 months or so, try not to get it on your fingernails; they stain easily and don't fade - you will have to wait for them to grow out
 - the more you practice the better you get - cliché but true
5. dark and long-lasting (just the way I like my.....henna designs)
- keyword: patience
 - once the design is finished the paste will start to dry out; after the surface of the henna changes from shiny to matte and before it starts to crack, gently dab it with a cotton ball soaked in the sugar-lemon juice mixture (see above); make sure not to remove or squash the paste on your skin when you dab it
 - keep the area of the design warm either over a candle or under a warm lamp; a hair dryer can work in cases where you need to dry the henna quickly, but can cause the henna to crack and flake off
 - if you need to warm an area such as the stomach or back or shoulder, use a heating pad or a hot water bottle (but wait until the henna is dry otherwise you will squash the design)
 - the tradition in Morocco is to warm the area over a charcoal brazier onto which has been sprinkled

incense or whole cloves (if you do this, don't breathe smoke as it is not very good for you)

- periodically reapply the sugar-lemon mixture to keep the design moist and sticky; touch up any holes or breaks in your design with a little henna paste
- if you really want the design to be dark and to last, I suggest that you sleep with it on; you must protect the design from flaking off while you sleep though the night
- one of my favorite products is a sticky gauze called Hypafix sold at medical supply stores; it comes in different lengths and widths; it's stretchy and breathable so it is perfect for holding henna in place, even while you sleep
- beauty sleep: if you are going to sleep with your henna on, wrap the area in toilet paper, paper towel gauze or cheesecloth, not too tightly, but not loosely because the material will rub against the henna and remove it or cover it with Hypafix; if you are doing your hands or feet, I suggest putting socks or mittens or cotton gloves over the area while you sleep (your body heat keeps the moisture in and helps fix the design); if your henna design is on some other area of the body, try wrapping an ace bandage around it or sleeping with a heating pad
- when you wake up and are ready to see your gorgeous design, unwrap yourself, and scrape the henna off (with your nails, a blunt knife, a comb); use oil to rub off the bits of henna that remain stuck to your skin; avoid contact with water for at least 12 hours after paste removal will ensure that the stain gets its darkest
- remember, when the paste is first removed the design will probably be bright orange; the design will darken in the next few days, so don't despair if it is a little light to begin with
- to make your design last, rub lotion or oil (non-petroleum based products only) into it daily, and try not to scrub it when bathing or doing housework and avoid using alcoholy lotions on it; you can also reapply the design using the faded one as your guide

Summary: good henna powder + acidity + heat + time = beautiful, dark, long lasting henna designs. Enjoy!