

Real People, Real Henna: General advice

All of the mix articles have been edited for simplicity so you can get the best results possible on the first try. Then, as with many things in life, once you learn the rules, you can break them!

What is absolutely necessary for your henna mix? To get the best results, you have to mix henna powder with a mildly acidic liquid to make a paste. Most fruit juices are ideal. The optimal pH of henna paste is pH5.5, so the acidic liquids should be pH 3.3 – pH5. If the liquid is too sour or alkaline, your results won't be the best.

- Get the best henna you can lay your hands on. Ancient Sunrise has the best quality henna, indigo, and cassia, with the finest sift, no adulterants, and no pesticides. <https://www.mehandi.com/Ancient-Sunrise-Henna-and-Herbal-Hair-Care-s/166.htm>
- Mix your henna with a mildly acidic liquid to conserve the hydrogens so that the lawsone will penetrate and bind to the cuticle of your hair. Ancient Sunrise acid powders mixed with distilled water are reliable and convenient. <https://www.mehandi.com/Ancient-Sunrise-Fruit-Acids-s/120.htm> There is almost certainly something in your kitchen that you can use to mix henna paste; here is what works: http://www.tapdancinglizard.com/AS_henna_for_hair/Chapter_6_Henna_and_Acid_Mixes.pdf
- Dye release is necessary. If you just hold henna leaves in your hand, they will not stain your skin. The lawsone molecule must migrate from the precursor in the henna leaf to stain the scale of your hair. A slow dye release is more forgiving than a fast release to allow for life's interruptions. Time/temperature chart for dye release: http://www.tapdancinglizard.com/AS_henna_for_hair/chapters/chap7/7_dye-release.pdf
- Be patient. When you first stir up your henna paste, it will be lumpy. Let it sit overnight and the lumps will smooth out. The cosmetic chemical hair dyes have outsold henna in the marketplace because the companies know people are impatient, and are willing to put up with damaged hair and health for convenience.

What can you mess around with that won't interfere with your results?

- Herbal tea. As long as you put some lemon juice in the tea, that'll do just fine in your henna mix. Let the tea completely cool before adding it to your henna. Herbal tea won't change the color of your henna results, but some smell nice.
- Spices. As long as they don't irritate your skin, (cinnamon and cloves can be irritating), that's just fine, too. Simmer them in water, but let the liquid cool down before adding it to henna. Spices won't change the color of your henna, but they will make your kitchen smell nice. If you want a mix with herbs and spices, strain out the chunks before adding the liquid to your mix: chunks tangle hair and crud up your drain.
- Acid rain: rainwater east of the Mississippi in the USA is acidic enough for henna dye release, about pH 4. In other places, rainwater is less acidic.
<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/ph-rainfall-usa-2002>

What can you mess around with that might create problems?

- Hot water will cause color fading over time.
http://www.tapdancinglizard.com/AS_henna_for_hair/chapters/chap6/6_henna-cassia-acids.pdf
- Wine (may make henna smell like a rotten bar room carpet)
- Vinegar (may make henna smell horrible)
- Tea tree oil, lavender essential oil, and other essential oils will not improve the stain and may give you're a splitting headache. "Terps" make henna stains darker on skin, but not on hair.
- Black coffee is acidic, but may leave you with a headache and nasty smelling hair and does not make the stain darker.
- Tap water. Tap water in some places is just fine, but some has minerals that will screw up your henna color, though it has probably been tested and declared safe to drink. Tap water in areas where there has been fossil fuel and mineral extraction can cause problems. Make up a sample and test it on hair harvested from your hair brush before you go 'whole head'.
- Honey, mixed with water, releases peroxide, and will interfere with the henna stain.

What can you put in henna that is basically useless, but some people have tried?

- Ketchup will not make your henna more red.
- Paprika will not make your henna more red.
- Blueberry, blackberry, and grape juice will not make your henna results more purple.
- Beet juice: any resulting red stain will be temporary. The beet dye molecule will not bind with your hair.
- Madder: the madder dye molecule will not dye your hair unless you boil your head in the dye. Any madder color in your hair will fade.
- Turmeric will not add gold tones to your hair.
- Chocolate will not make henna brown.
- Walnut. Walnut husks don't add color to henna, and can cause allergic reactions.
- Rusty nails do not make henna stains darker.