

Additional Techniques for Henna at Home and in the Salon

If a person is in a salon to have their hair hennaed, or if a woman is hennaing her hair at home, there will be time for additional henna applications and beauty care while henna stains the hair, just as was done until recently in henna-using cultures.



The North African woman in the image above, photographed about 100 years ago, has hennaed hair, feet, palms, and fingertips; henna was an essential part of her beauty and wellness.

Well into the 20th century women in areas of the world where henna was a tradition went to the hammam, the women’s public baths, as often as they could manage.¹ Hammams were often as elegantly decorated as a cathedral, with steam rooms, cold and hot baths, attendants and masseuses. The hammam was the traditional setting for applying henna to hair, feet, and hands. A visit to the hammam was a necessity once-a-month treat for complete cleansing after a menstrual cycle or for preparing for a holiday or family celebration. Women spent the whole day at the hammam, visiting with their friends, catching up on gossip and local news while the henna stained their hair, soles, and fingertips. Henna was part of women’s regular health and beauty maintenance program, integrated with social and family life. Bathing, health, and beauty practices today are private, medicalized, tend to be secretive and hurried, and are framed in

¹ See map of the world henna traditions in Chapter 2, The History of Henna Hair Dye

scientific jargon and ‘new and improved’ products. A century ago, across much of the world, women’s health and beauty was a cooperative effort among their family and friends who used their own formulations and shared techniques.



Women did simple henna for regular health and appearance maintenance. Elaborate designs were added and scaled to the importance of the occasion, as well as to show off wealth and taste.²

The simplest patterns were suited to the health of women’s hands as they did their daily work. As henna stained the palms a woman’s hands, they made the skin softer and stronger. Women who wove carpets and embroidered silks needed strong hands without any roughness in their fingertips and fingernails that would catch on the fibers. Henna kept cuticles from becoming dry and torn from scrubbing. Henna reduced the ache and discomfort of hands that worked hard. A woman whose hands and nails were firm and strong could be more productive than a woman whose hands and nails were tender, split, and broken.

When there was a festival or party, there was often a bowl of henna ready for the guests. Women would arrive and sit down with friends they hadn’t seen for a long time and get reacquainted as they applied henna to each other’s fingertips, soles, and palms. They would sit, reminisce, laugh, and talk for as long as it took for the henna to stain. The slow process of henna not only fit seamlessly into women’s lives, it enhanced the bonds of friendships and social connections.

² Henna by Catherine Cartwright-Jones PhD, with Becoming Moonlight® gilding technique.

A wealthy family would often hire a henna artist to apply elaborate designs to the most important people at a wedding party, such as to the bride and the mother of the groom. The artist would apply smaller designs to the rest of the family, but it was important for every woman (and some men) get henna at a celebration: henna brought luck to each person and proved that they had been part of the event.



Musicians and dancers, whose appearance was an important part of their performance, hennaed their hands and feet for beauty and to lessen the discomfort and fatigue after long performances; henna can reduce the sensation of pain in palms and soles.⁴ When performers used their hands expressively, hennaed fingertips and nails caught people's eyes. The musicians who played stringed instruments often kept their fingertips hennaed to reduce discomfort from playing the strings and to protect their fingertips from cracking. When drummers hennaed their hands, they were more comfortable after long percussive performance; there was less swelling and soreness.⁵ Dancers hennaed their feet to keep them healthy and comfortable as well as beautiful. Diabetic

³ Henna and gilding by Catherine Cartwright-Jones

⁴ Yucel I, Guzin G., 2008, Topical henna for capecitabine induced hand-foot syndrome. *Investigational New Drugs*. 26 (2) : 189-92. Epub 2007 Sep 21.

⁵ Gupta, S., Ali, M., Pillai, K. K., Sarwar Alam, M. 1993. "Evaluation of anti-inflammatory activity of some constituents of *Lawsonia inermis*" *Fitoterapia*, Volume 64, Issue 4, 1993, Pages 365-366

persons whose feet were fragile and painful used the traditional remedy of hennaing their feet⁶ to strengthen skin, improve wound healing, and reduce the discomfort of diabetic neuropathy.⁷



While henna is dyeing a person's hair, apply ornamental henna patterns to that person's, hands, arms, feet and legs; read 'how to' instructions at hennapage.com to learn about henna body art.



⁶ Yogisha, S., Samiulla, D.S., Prashanth, D., Padmaja, R., Amit, A. "Trypsin inhibitory activity of Lawsonia inermis" *Fitoterapia Volume 73, Issues 7-8, December 2002, Pages 690-691*

⁷ Mutluoğlu M, Uzun G., (2009) Can henna prevent ulceration in diabetic feet at high risk? *Experimental Diabetes Research*. 2009:107496.

Ancient Sunrise® Henna for Hair, Chapter 15, Additional Techniques for Henna

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