

Quilting Tips & Tuts #3 – Save My Bleeding Quilt!

How to Properly Remove Excess Dye From A Quilt by Pam Wingate

This month's Tip was submitted by guild member, Tina Connolly, and reprinted with permission by Vicki Welsh, vickiwelsch.com, the original author. I think this may definitely come in handy for many of you - I know I wish I had seen this a couple of months ago!

There's nothing worse for a quilter than washing our quilt for the first time, pulling it out of the washing machine and finding out that one of the fabrics has run and ruined your quilt. It happens with both hand dyed and commercial fabrics. Dyeing processes vary so much and different colors of dyes react differently on different fabrics so it's really impossible for a fabric manufacturer to make all fabric perfectly colorfast.....just think about how much our clothes run in the wash.

As a fabric dyer I have spent many hours testing washing processes to make my fabrics as colorfast as possible. My quilts use both hand dyed and commercial fabrics. As a result I have developed the following guidelines for getting excess dye out of your quilt and for prewashing fabric.

Even if your quilt has already been washed and dried, you can still do this process to remove excess dye but it's best if this is the process that you use for the first wash. I can't totally guarantee it will work 100% but this will give you the best chance for success. Read all of the background about my testing here (<http://bit.ly/JyHv1E>).

It's important to have a large volume of water for the quilt to soak in. I use my bathtub. There isn't enough water or room for the quilt in the washing machine. The quilt needs to be loose in the water. The water holds the excess dye so the more water the better.

Start filling the tub with hot water. It doesn't have to be boiling but the hotter the better. I have the hot water heater in my house set to 140F so it's quite hot coming out of the tap. If your water isn't very hot you can add some pots of boiling water. The truth is that time is more important than heat but the heat does help the process along.

Add soap and the quilt. For a large quilt I will use as much as a half cup of soap. The soap is what keeps the dye particles from re-adsorbing to your quilt so don't be stingy. My preference is Dawn Pure Dish detergent. I have used a Free & Clear type laundry detergent with success. Avoid using any detergent with fragrances or additives. The additives can have chemical structures that cause particles to adhere to your quilt or additives that may fade fabric. I have only tested unscented products. Do not use Dharma Textile Detergent, Synthrapol or Retayne especially if you have any commercial fabrics in your quilt. My testing has proven that these detergents do not behave well with some commercial fabrics and it's impossible to tell which fabrics will have problems. Dharma Textile Detergent can cause backstaining on some fabrics and Synthrapol will fade some fabrics. Retayne is for a completely different use. Do not ever use it unless you are very familiar with the product. Once the tub is about half full with water you can add the quilt.



You need gloves but not dye catching sheets. For this quilt I did use some dye catching sheets but subsequent testing proved that they are totally unnecessary. You can use 1 just to see how much dye is being released but otherwise they are not needed. You will need some heavy duty gloves to protect your hands from the heat. I have 2 sets of these gloves, one inside of the other, to insulate my hands from the hot water.



While the tub is filling agitate and move the quilt in the water. The quilt should have plenty of room to move around in the water and it needs to be agitated for a while. I'll agitate it while it's filling and for another 5 or 10 minutes after the tub is full. If the water gets VERY dark right away let it soak (agitating every 10 minutes or so) for an hour and then drain the water and start over.

Make sure the entire quilt is under water and let the quilt soak for 12 hours. I use plastic bin lids and containers of water to weight the quilt and make sure it stays under water. If any part of the quilt sticks above the water dye will stick to the quilt at the water line. You can see the dye catching sheet in the water but it's really not necessary. The important thing is time. I've found that there is a point in the soak where the fabric seems to "burp" and release the rest of the dye. That can happen between 3 and 12 hours. Blue is the most difficult dye to get out (especially turquoise blues) and red is the most likely to stain the quilt. The soap is what keeps the dye particles suspended in the water.



Repeat until the water is clear. If there is color in the water after 12 hours repeat the entire process until the water remains clear for at least 6 hours. I do not add a lot of soap to each subsequent soak. I make a judgment call on each soak to determine how much I need. In this wash I knew that most of the dye was gone so I did not add more soap. There was soap still in the quilt and that was plenty.

Carefully drain and remove the quilt. You can rinse it either in the tub with cold water or in the washing machine. I can't promise that this will work 100% of the time because different fabrics react differently but this has worked for me consistently with commercial and hand dyed cotton fabrics. Test on swatches of fabric if you are unsure or are using different fiber content fabrics. The quilt in the photos is one that I knew would run and that's why I chose it for testing the process. If you have different results and want to discuss them please contact me at vickiwelsh.com.

For new fabric I do this process in the washing machine. I tested it by running a new batch of fabric through a wash cycle with a dye catching sheet. After a normal wash cycle in hot water the dye sheet was clean. Next I soaked the same fabric for 12 hours using the process above. After 12 hours the dye catching sheet was very dark! At some point in the soak the fabric released the excess dye. That dye would have eventually released onto my quilt. Maybe not in the first wash, but eventually. Better safe than sorry.

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