



SCHOOL of SWEETGEORGIA

SPINNING HANDPAINTED COLOUR

exploring the effects of handpainted fibre on handspun yarn





SPINNING HANDPAINTED COLOUR



Welcome to “Spinning Handpainted Color”!

Gorgeous, richly coloured braids of hand-dyed fibre can be irresistible but also intimidating! Spinners often fear that they will turn a beautiful hand-dyed fibre into a skein of mud. In this workshop, we will cover some basic principles of colour theory as well as a variety of techniques for spinning handpainted fibres to bring out the best in the colours and fibre. Learn to subdue, enhance, and brighten colours using different blending, drafting, and plying techniques.

Let's begin!



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Felicia Lo".

Felicia Lo

Founder + Creative Director, SweetGeorgia Yarns



OBSERVATION + INTENTION

Beautiful braid of hand-dyed fibre in hand... what do you want it to become? I always advocate spinning with intention, that is having a goal in mind based on observations and decisions about the fibre.

- ❑ look at the **dyeing** — Is it splotchy or consistently repeating? How long or short are the colour sections? How fat/narrow is the fibre? It will all affect how much colour is in each section.
- ❑ look at **staple length** and compare with the length of the colour sections. This will affect the inherent ability to get clear colours.
- ❑ look at the **fibre characteristics** — is it smooth, fuzzy, carded, combed? How do you want your yarn to look? Smooth and shiny, or warm and woolen?
- ❑ consider **yarn purpose** — will it be for socks vs sweater? 2-ply or 3-ply? what is the target weight?
- ❑ consider **colour** — how do you want the colours to appear in the finished yarn? Large chunks of colour vs random, spotty effect? Can you identify **hues and colour schemes**? E.g. Is it complementary or analogous? What are the chances you'll get “mud” if you spin it randomly?



HANDPAINTED FIBRES

Disclosure: some of the links here are affiliate links, meaning, at no additional cost to you, we may earn a commission if you click through and make a purchase.

I demonstrate all the techniques using one of my all-time favourite spinning fibres – [SweetGeorgia BFL+Silk](#) but there are plenty of other options for starting out.

You can also find spinning fibres at these suppliers:

SweetGeorgia Yarns (Canada)

<https://sweetgeorgiayarns.com/product-category/spinning-fibre/>

Penelope Fibre Arts (Canada)

<https://www.penelopefibrearts.com/collections/fibres>

Gemini Fibres (Canada)

<http://www.geminifibres.com/>

The Woolery (US)

<https://woolery.com/spinning-fibers.html>

Paradise Fibres (US)

<https://www.paradisefibers.com/>

Susan's Fiber (US)

<https://www.susansfiber.com/collections/fiber>

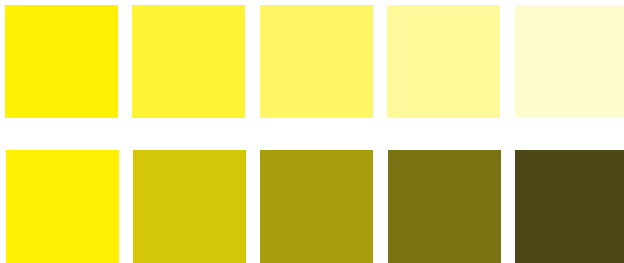
World of Wool (UK)

<https://www.worldofwool.co.uk/collections/dyed-wool>

If you're choosing your first spinning fibre, consider wool breeds like Corriedale, Bluefaced Leicester, and Coopworth which are a little grippier (and a little coarser), making it easier to work with for starters. As you begin to develop more muscle memory and confidence with your spinning and drafting, there is a world of incredible wools, silks, and luxury fibres that await!

COLOUR THEORY

hue What colour is it? The characteristic of colour that distinguishes red from yellow from blue. Hues are dependent on the dominant wavelength of light that is emitted or reflected from an object.



value describes the relative lightness or darkness of a hue, or how close it is to pure black or pure white. Tints are obtained by mixing hues with white. Shades are obtained by mixing hues with black. Tones are obtained by mixing hues with grey.



saturation / chroma describes the relative brightness or dullness of a colour. Expresses intensity or chroma of a colour. Adding grey to a hue will desaturate the colour.

monochromatic colours are shades, tints and tones of a single hue family.

analogous colours are shades, tints and tones that are within adjacent hue families, between two primaries.

complementary colours are pairs of colours that are opposite each other on the colour wheel.

split complementary colours are sets of colours that include one colour and the two colours on each side of its complementary colour on the colour wheel.

Generally in art, painting and design applications, the RYB (Red/Yellow/Blue) colour model is used. There also exists the RGB (Red/Green/Blue) colour model for video/film, photography applications, and CMY (Cyan/Magenta/Yellow) colour model for print design applications.

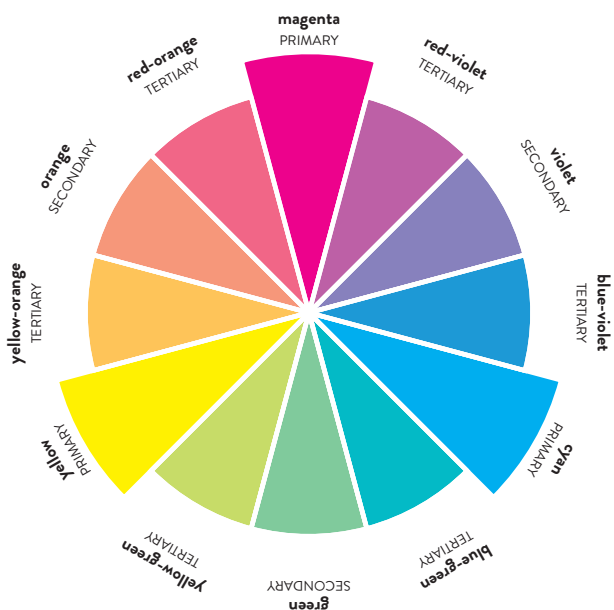
Primary Colours: pure colours that cannot be mixed from other colours. In the RYB model, the primary colours are Red, Yellow and Blue. In CMY, the primary colours are Cyan, Magenta, and Yellow.

Secondary Colours: colours that are formed by the sum of two primary colours of equal intensity (e.g. Red + Yellow = Orange, Yellow + Blue = Green).

Tertiary Colours: colours that are formed by mixing half primary colour and half secondary colours together (e.g. Yellow + Orange = Yellow Orange, Blue + Green = Blue Green).

Warm & Cool Colours: The colour wheel can be divided into warm colours and cool colours. Warm colours appear to advance in space whereas cool colours recede.

Since our dyes and paints can never be considered perfectly pure, the primary colours we use have inherent warm or cool undertones, i.e. warm red vs cool red (magenta), warm blue (turquoise) vs cool blue (violet). So, blending warm red and warm blue cannot produce a clean purple colour, but rather a desaturated (muddy) plum colour.



COLOUR MIXING



colour mixing is equivalent to mixing dye colours before applying it to the fibre. The original colours used are no longer evident in the final mixture.

Neutral grey can be mixed from all three primary colours in a specific proportion. This is accomplished by mixing two complementary colours together.

The advantage of knowing how to create neutral grey is that you can apply that knowledge to desaturate bright colours and manipulate them. For example, if you mixed a bright and saturated orange from red and yellow, you can tone it down with blue.

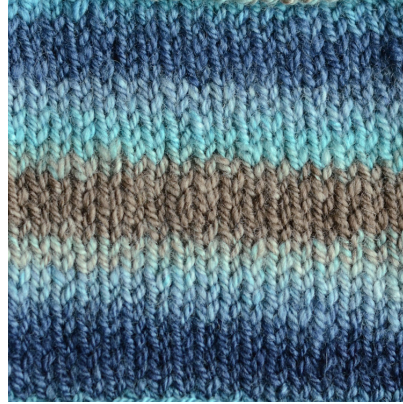
Colours mixed using all three primaries appear more complex, are less bright, and more closely imitate naturally found or naturally-dyed colours than two-colour mixes.

Being a handspinner, we have the advantage of being able to optically mix and blend pre-dyed fibres together in the proportions that we want, in order to create the final colours and textures that we want.

optical mixing occurs when two or more distinct colours are placed close together and viewed at a distance. An optical mix is an average hues, values, and saturations of the parent colours. This is the basis of pointillism in painting, the CMYK printing process and also the basic of creating handspun yarns from multiple colours.

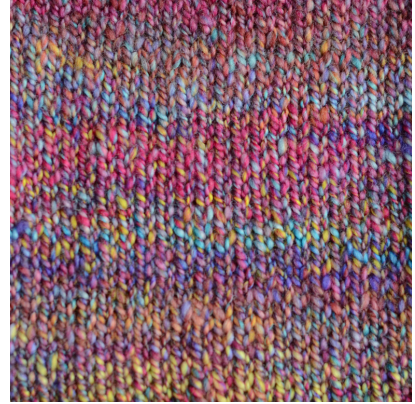
In addition to hue, value, and saturation, another significant variable of optical mixing is the **size of the dots of colour**. And in handspun yarn, we can control the size of the dots of colour by how thoroughly we card or blend the fibres. w

PRESERVING COLOUR



- ❑ **stripped and plied (2-ply or 3-ply):** try to evenly split your fibre into equally sized strips. Spin each to a bobbin and ply together, attempting to match up the colour sections.
- ❑ **navajo plying:** an excellent technique to make a 3-ply yarn. Effectively this is plying while also making a crochet chain of your singles yarn. Use this plying technique to make these additional colour effects:
 - ❑ **graduated/ombré yarn:** break up and sort your colours into piles and spin each pile in succession
 - ❑ **self-striping yarn:** using a fibre with long colour sections
 - ❑ **short-colour section spotty yarn:** strip your fibre to make smaller bits of colour, then navajo-ply this yarn.

BLENDING COLOURS



- ❑ **stripping for short colour sections:** Size of the strips will affect the appearance. The thicker the strips, the clearer and longer the colours will be in the yarn.
- ❑ **combination spinning:** combine narrow strips from different rovings to create ever-new colour combinations. Draft several different colourways together at once. This gives a singles yarn a plied look and a plied yarn a very tweedy and blended look.
- ❑ **effect of pre-drafting:** pre-drafting seems like a benign and sometimes optional step in the spinning process, but it actually will smooth out colour transitions in your finished yarn
- ❑ **fractal spinning:** a technique whereby you split your roving into different sized narrow strips and ply it back together: split your roving in half and use one half to spin one bobbin of singles. Take the other half and strip it multiple times and then spin these narrow strips successively onto a second bobbin. Ply the two.

CARDING + COMBING



Want something a little more homogeneous? Blend them on a drum carder or with hand cards. Yarns from a distance look uniform and even, however have a rich and heathered appearance upon closer inspection. It is also a wonderful way to add additional fibres such as silk to the final blend. The original colours are all still present, however they are blended to give a pointillist effect. Blending colours by carding is a good way to broaden the range of your yarns without dyeing more fibre. Colours produced by blending are richer than their solid counterparts.

- ❑ A drum carder cannot perform miracles. Garbage in, garbage out. Feed only clean wool to the drum carder. A drum carder won't remove much vegetable matter.

- ❑ Do not overcard the blend. If the colours are blended together too much, the final outcome might appear dull. Keep some of the colour distinct.
- ❑ Colours that are close in value are easier to blend together. Choose colours lighter and brighter than your goal. Brightness is easily lost as we mix and blend colours, desaturating them.
- ❑ One or two passes should be enough to mix the colours but also retain some vibrancy.
- ❑ Blending in luxury fibres: use at least 50% silk for its lustre to show. Use at least 25 to 33% mohair for its lustre to show. Use at least 20 to 25% wool for its characteristics to show.

LEARN WITH US



JOIN OUR SWEETGEORGIA COMMUNITY

There's nothing like having a community of fellow fibre artists and friends to encourage and inspire you during the learning journey. Whether you love knitting, spinning, dyeing, weaving, crochet, or quilting, we'd love to connect with you about colour inspirations and ideas. You can find our communities here:

INSTAGRAM:

<https://www.instagram.com/schoolofsweetgeorgia/>

Instagram is an app designed for sharing photos and videos, making it ideal for sharing our love for the fibre arts. Post your photos and tag us with the hashtag #schoolofsweetgeorgia so we can see what you've been making. Follow our posts @schoolofsweetgeorgia to see what we're cooking up too!



EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY FORUMS:

<https://www.schoolofsweetgeorgia.com/community/>

Exclusive for All-Access members of our online School is a separate space where we can chat and discuss the details of learning about colour and craft.



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SweetGeorgia Yarns Inc. | unapologetic colour + craft since 2005
1562 Rand Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6P 3G2 | Canada | TEL 604.569.6811

sweetgeorgiayarns.com