



Natural Food Dyes...at Home!

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As a new mom, I've been trying to provide the healthiest foods possible for my family that don't have added chemicals and unnecessary ingredients. According to the [2015 Nielson Survey](#), I'm not alone in this journey! Consumers are going back to the basics with about 4 in 10 global respondents regarding having foods with natural ingredients (43%) and no artificial colors (42%) and flavors (41%) very important. This is great news, but take a look down just about any food aisle and you'll quickly realize this task is easier said than done!

We recently celebrated our son's first birthday and I wanted to find a cake option that wasn't loaded with sugar, chemicals and dyes (much to the dismay of my family who kept telling me "just give the boy some real cake!"). I searched the web high and low for no sugar added "smash" cake recipes and options for natural food dyes. There are [vegetable-based food dyes](#) you can purchase but they're a bit pricey so I decided to give homemade food dyes a try.

I'd say the end product was a success!! He LOVED his "smash" cake and I loved knowing that it was good for him. A win-win situation for mom and baby!

Natural Food Dye How-To's

Making homemade natural food dyes was surprisingly easier than I thought. These 3 simple steps are all you need to get started:

- 1. Create colors one at a time.** Use fruits, vegetables, spices and other foods to create a colored liquid. Puree food in a blender to liquefy, then strain off any pulp and seeds or use a juicer to extract the juice without any pulp. You can also purchase pure juice from the store (carrot, pomegranate, cranberry, etc). See the guide below to creating different colors or check out this [video tutorial](#).
- 2. Reduce colored liquids to make a more concentrated, colorful paste.** Pour juice into a small saucepan and cook over low heat until it reduces to a thick, vibrantly colored paste. This part is tricky and you have to be patient! I accidentally burned a few batches because it was taking a while and I left it unattended for a little too long. One tip [online](#) suggested reducing liquids in a mini-crock pot.
- 3. Stir into frostings, dough or batter.** Add small amounts of food dyes to your recipe gradually. A little should go a long way but you'll need more than you're used to adding with store bought food colorings. Any extra can be poured into ice cube trays and stored in the freezer.

Blue is one of the hardest dyes to create. To make blue food dye, start with a head of red cabbage and boil over medium heat for about 10 minutes or until the liquid is a deep purple (you can stop here if you want purple dye). Strain liquid and stir in about ½ teaspoon of baking soda. The purple liquid will magically turn to blue before your eyes- it's amazing! Then follow the remaining steps above to create a more concentrated paste.

Guide to Making Natural Food Dyes

At Home

Add small amounts of food dyes to your recipe gradually.

Unless you have a very concentrated, deeply colored paste you'll likely only be able to achieve lighter, more pastel colors with juices. Powders can give you the opportunity to create deeper colors with no added liquid.

Remember that these dyes can impart flavor so choose your flavor combinations wisely just in case!



Red

pure pomegranate juice

pure beet juice

beet powder

Green

spinach juice

spinach powder

matcha powder

parsley juice



parsley powder

wheatgrass juice



Pink

pure beet juice

pure cranberry juice

Blue

red cabbage juice
with baking soda stirred in

(turns it from purple to blue)

* Blue is one of the most difficult dyes to create.
This trick really does work but once added to frosting it can look purple again if not concentrated.



Orange

pure carrot juice

carrot powder

paprika

Purple

pure blueberry juice

purple sweet potatoes

red cabbage juice

purple grape juice, concentrated



Yellow

fresh turmeric juice

ground turmeric

saffron

Brown

cinnamon

cocoa powder

pure espresso



heavily steeped
black tea

Tips for Success

When making natural food dyes, there are a few things to remember:

- **Natural dyes tend to create lighter, more pastel hues than store bought varieties.** Store bought food dyes are very concentrated so you only need a few drops to create the desired color. Natural food dyes are not as concentrated so many recipes simply can't stand up to the amount of liquid you would have to add to achieve the same color. You might have a hard time getting a true red for say a fire engine cake, but just a few drops of beet juice will give you a gorgeous shade of pink!
- **Concentrate, concentrate, concentrate your colorants!!** While I ended up with a gorgeous shade of blue colored liquid, I was never able to achieve a blue frosting for the cake because I wasn't able to add enough liquid to get it past appearing purple. Be more patient than I was and let your liquids really reduce to get a more vibrantly colored end product!
- **Try vegetable powders for more vibrant color options.** If you're having trouble achieving the hues needed by concentrating colored liquids, try creating vegetable powders. This will give you the opportunity to create more vivid colors without adding excess liquid. Check out this [tutorial](#) from Nourishing Joy for more details.
- **Strongly colored foods tend to be strongly flavored foods.** Since natural food dyes are foods themselves, you have to be careful with flavor profiles. Keep your end product in mind and pair savory colorants with savory dishes and sweeter colorants with frostings, batters, etc. Use as little dye as possible to not impart unwanted flavors. This is why it's important to reduce your colored liquids to a concentrated paste or try vegetable powders.

Sources:

Homemade Food Coloring, NourishingJoy.com

How to Make Homemade Food Coloring, [Food Network](#)