



# TRUE COLOURS

Radiant reds and burnished brunettes can be achieved naturally and easily with traditional herbal products combined with the best of modern techniques.



**F**ROM THE WEATHER TO your wardrobe, autumn really is the season of change, making it a good time to turn over a new leaf with your hair colour too.

Warm auburn shades, zingy reds and deep rich browns are so flattering at this time of year. And these earthy tones are easily achieved with plant-based dyes such as henna, which we've all heard of, as well as cassia obovata, indigo and amla, to create both vibrant results and incredible shine. But forget the henna of the past – the latest techniques and tips mean you can get glorious, natural-looking results.

**HOW DO THEY WORK?**

Herbal colourants usually come as dried and crushed leaves that then have to be mixed with liquid, such as water, lemon juice or coconut milk, to create a paste. Unlike regular dyes, they do not open the cuticle to change the hair colour, but simply stain the shaft, thereby becoming part of the hair. 'Plant proteins in a herbal colourant bind with the hair's proteins, thus strengthening and shielding hair,' explains Christine Shahin, cosmetologist and holistic beauty practitioner. 'Herbal colourants can create a wide range of shades, from subtle to vibrant, while also conditioning and adding sheen,' she says.

But while herbal dyes are ideal for tinting hair, they can't make your hair lighter, and if you have greys, they can often be more of a challenge to colour. 'Herbal dye is akin to a varnish, so the more coats you apply, the deeper and more powerful the colour will be,' explains Daniel Campbell, product formulator for Lush Cosmetics. 'So for a longer-lasting effect when you're dyeing silver hair, I would recommend applying a number of coats.'

Herbal colour will fade over time unless you regularly do top-up treatments to build up the colour so any regrowth can be softened. 'The more subtle or softer herbals such as cassia and indigo can fade, though with frequent repeated use will add deeper longer-lasting tone, and, depending on hair colour and texture, indigo can last many months to a year,' explains Christine. Henna stains the hair shaft more deeply and although it does fade, this happens over a long period of time, not in a couple weeks, so you will get a bit of regrowth, especially if your hair is grey.

After colouring, always use a sulphate-free shampoo to preserve your colour and prevent fading.



**TRY A HERBAL COLOUR**



WORDS: SARAH COOPER-WHITE. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK, MELINDA DIMAURO.

There are four herbal plants commonly used for creating various tones to colour hair: henna, indigo, amla and cassia. 'Henna is red, indigo is blue and cassia is yellow. Red, yellow and blue are the three primary colours and the ones from which all other colours are created,' says Christine. Amla will not dye hair, but can help tone down the red or brown colour of a henna-indigo mix. These herbs can be used individually or, if you're open to experimenting, mixed together to create your own unique shade. 'Everyone's hair grabs herbal colour in different ways,' says Christine. Here she explains how they work...

**HENNA** is renowned for its beautiful red colour used to dye everything from skin, hair and

finger nails to fabrics and more. Made from the dried and crushed leaves of a small flowering shrub, when mixed with other herbal dyes such as indigo or amla, you can achieve a whole range of hair colours from funky red to rich chocolate brown and the deepest jet black.

**CASSIA** obovata is a tree in the legume family. The leaves, when dried and powdered, are commonly used to dye hair a yellow tone. Cassia is often described as blonde, colourless or neutral henna, but it cannot lighten hair with a dark base and does not lift hair tones like a chemical blonde colourant or bleach does. But for those with lighter locks, it will add brightness and golden hues. Try mixing with henna to create shades of strawberry blonde or copper.

With plants you can achieve a whole range of colours from funky red to rich chocolate brown and the deepest jet black.

**INDIGO** is a shrub with feathery green leaves that when dried and powdered produce a rich blue colour, ideal for giving depth to darker hair. Indigo is often used with henna to achieve deep reds, brownish reds, brown and black. If you're feeling daring, it can also be used alone on pure white hair, producing colours ranging from vivid bright green or teal to an amazing deep purple and sometimes blue/green.

**AMLA** is the dried berry of the Indian gooseberry, and while it is not considered a pigment because it does not deposit a deep colour on the hair, it is often mixed with other herbs to create a lighter, more subtle colour or for adjusting tone.

## Using plant-based dyes

Daniel Campbell, product formulator for Lush Cosmetics, explains how to get the best results from a herbal dye...

● **TEST IT.** Just like any hair dye, do a patch test to make sure you have no adverse reaction to the product. Do this by mixing up a small amount exactly as you would do when you use it, paint some onto your skin inside your elbow or behind your ear and leave it for 48 hours to check your sensitivity. Also use some of the mixture to do a strand test on a few plucked out hairs to check you like the colour result. Leave it on for as long as you plan to colour it.

● **PREPARE YOUR SPACE.** Take a little time to prepare your workspace, including your sink and bathroom floor, by laying down newspaper to ensure that the dye doesn't end up where you don't want it to, staining furniture or the decor.

● **MIX IT UP.** Wearing gloves, so the dye doesn't stain your hands, mix up the mixture in a plastic bowl. Experiment with amounts to work out how much your hair needs, but you could start by trying around 75g just for your roots and if you have long hair and are doing it all over, try 150g. Make your mixture relatively runny, using plenty of liquid. It should be warm when it goes on. To make the application easier, apply with a brush. You can always apply another coat on top if needed.

PHOTOGRAPH: MELINDA DIMAURO.

## HOW TO MIX IT

As a general rule, use more henna to cover grey hair and more indigo the darker you want your hair to be. Always buy your dyes from good health food shops or check out the selection on [renaissancehenna.com](http://renaissancehenna.com) to ensure they are 100 per cent natural and pure.

- For a light brown shade, use 50 per cent cassia, 25 per cent henna and 25 per cent indigo.
  - To get a medium brown colour, use 25 per cent cassia, 25 per cent henna and 50 per cent indigo.
  - To get a dark brown or if your grey hair is resistant to herbal hair colour, apply a mix of 50 per cent henna and 50 per cent indigo.



PHOTOGRAPH: MELINDA DIMAURO.

● **WRAP UP.** When you've covered your whole head with dye, keep it moist and warm by covering your hair in a plastic shower cap and, for extra humidity, wrap a towel or a scarf round your head too. Keeping the dye moist will make it much easier to rinse out too.

● **DON'T RUSH.** The longer you keep the dye on your hair, the better the result – it can be anything from two hours to a whole day for deeper results. When it's time to remove, do not use shampoo as it can dilute the colour that may not yet be fixed on your hair. Instead just rinse out with warm water and then apply a little conditioner before giving your hair a final cool rinse to set the colour.

# CREATE YOUR BESPOKE COLOUR

- **EXPERIMENT.** You can adjust the concentration of herbs to create different base colours depending on your natural hair colour. 'Part of the joy of herbal hair colour is that it gives you your own unique colour rather than trying to achieve a standard colour that everyone else has,' says Christine.
- **TRY A NEW TECHNIQUE.** If you don't want to colour your hair all over, how about trying an ombre technique or highlights? 'You can create lovely red and chocolate brown tones in the hair by mixing the different dyes and applying in streaks to your hair. Your hair really is the canvas, and the beautiful thing about herbal colourants is that they work in harmony with the colours you already have in your hair to enhance them,' says Daniel.
- **THE TWO-STEP PROCESS.** To cover grey hair or blend a very obvious regrowth line, you'll need to use a two-step process to get the best results. 'Most often, this involves using pure henna first for at least one hour,' advises Christine. 'This stains or fills the hair that no longer holds pigment. This is then followed by using pure indigo or henna for various durations of time depending on how dark you want your hair to go.'



## GOOD TO GO

Prefer to use a ready-blended herbal dye? Try these...

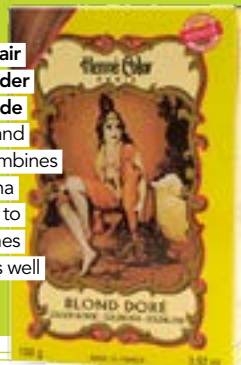


**LUSH Henna Hair Dyes** (£9.95, [uk.lush.com](http://uk.lush.com)) are perfect if you want to boost your hair's natural shine or add a gloss of colour. There are four unique blends containing henna, indigo, cocoa butter and raw materials such as coffee and essential oils.



**Colour Me Organic Hair Dye in Burgundy** (£10.49, [aubreyorganicsuk.co.uk](http://aubreyorganicsuk.co.uk)) is a natural colourant made with herbal henna, indigo and amla powders, grown and harvested according to Ayurvedic traditions.

**Henna Color Hair Colouring Powder in Golden Blonde** (£7.49, [hollandandbarrett.com](http://hollandandbarrett.com)) combines cassia with henna and chamomile to give golden tones to lighter hair as well as cover grey.



**Natural Hair Coloring**  
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