

## To dye or not to dye, that is the question (22, 09, 12)

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TV hair commercials truly fascinate me. They employ lovely-looking models with long, gorgeous hair that swirls suggestively from side to side, and there is always an extreme close-up shot of the fickle follicles dancing suggestively, probably because there is a heavy-duty, industrial-sized fan on the set. We see brunette, blonde and red hair at its immaculate best. We watch in fascination, and think: “Why can I not look like her?” That’s just the guys. Senior women think: “Why does my husband not take better care of the few strands of hair that he has left?” Which, of course, brings me to the age-old question: to dye or not to dye – the words taken directly from Shakespeare’s great play, Hamlet, which should not be confused in any way with a small town or city.



Down through the ages from the age of dinosaurs to the current age of minority government, people have been colouring their hair, often for dramatic effect. Ancient Greek men reddened their hair to suggest a fiery symbol of courage to opponents. Strange that modern day firemen have not picked up on this fad. The Romans, much less flamboyant than the prissy Greeks, used natural dyes to darken their prized locks. And for pure excess, during the 1700s, French women employed myriad rainbow powders to tint their curls outlandish shades of blue, yellow, pink and white. Yes, the French were precursors to our punk rock and true pioneers in the field. Today, half of North American women colour their hair, and I have noticed that more and more men are getting into colour supplements to supplement those other dramatic supplements that we should not really get into during the family hour.

Now that we have established an historical rationale for hair dyeing, we must look at the economic issues. Let’s accept that it’s expensive to visit a hair salon, so like the Romans, more and more people are now dyeing their own hair. This can be great fun, and you can combine it with family outings in the woods and meadows that are readily accessible here in Niagara. For example, roots, nuts and flowers are a few common natural ways to produce many colors such as yellow, orange, blue, red, green, brown and grey.

There are a few gathering rules. When collecting plant material for dyeing, remember that blossoms should be in full bloom, berries ripe and nuts mature. To make the dye solution, you merely chop the plant material into small pieces and place them in a pot. Then, you double the amount of water to that of the plant material. Next, you bring it to a boil, then let it simmer for an hour. Strain the results and now you can insert your head in the bowl. This is the hard part and for many inexperienced types, the first few times that you try this, you might also dye your forehead and ear lobes. Don’t worry; it will create a startling effect and surely get the attention of your friends.

For a stronger shade, you must allow your head to soak in the dye overnight. This is very difficult, but if you are determined, you can do it. Be prepared however for the disaster of falling asleep with your entire head in the bowl. You will look silly and may have to remain indoors for a month or so. Some of you simply want accents like those people walking around with tufts of blue hair peeking out from beneath their large hats.



If you do not like family outings to the woods or meadows, a box of hair dye usually ranges from \$5 to \$10, but it’s far less challenging and surely anti-environment.

Another issue related to hair colour that I have noticed is that the grass is always greener on your neighbour’s yard or in the case of Irma Bombeck, directly over the septic

tank. This means that if you are a brunette, you want to be a blonde and vice versa. Redheads are content to remain red. They are, after all, the most colourful!