

Dyeing for a Great New Hair Color?

By Ariel Meadow Stallings

Dye it at home—
with *figure's*
complete guide

My name is Ariel, and I'm a hair-color addict. It all began with a few innocent highlights at the salon. But soon I absolutely *had* to change my base color, and then I started yearning for lowlights. Before I knew it, I was booking appointments for root maintenance every two weeks, my credit cards were maxed out, and my colorist



Ariel before

knew more about my life than my mother.

Beautifully colored hair makes a woman feel transformed, but I was tired of spending a fortune at the salon. So I decided to take matters into my own hands. With the help of expert colorist Victoria Gentry, owner of the Seattle salon Vain, I learned how to get gorgeous salon-quality hair at home.

Choosing a Color

If this is your first home-dyeing adventure, Gentry recommends staying within three to four shades of your starting color. "Changing your hair more drastically is a huge maintenance commitment," she explains. "Your roots will be extremely visible as the dyed portion grows out." It will also be more difficult to strip the color from your hair if you don't like how it turns out. Gentry offers some ground rules:

If you want to go darker:

Both brown and black shades have ashy undertones, so blondes or light browns who go dark can end up with green or bluish tints as the color fades. To counteract this, use a warmer brown with red tones instead of gray or black tones.

If you want to go blonde:

Remember that anytime you lighten your hair, you'll pick up some warm red tones, so avoid strawberry-blonde shades, which can leave you with carrot or brassy tones.

If you want to go red:

If you're lightening your hair, you'll automatically uncover some natural red tones, so you won't need to dye red to get red. Instead, try a shade of reddish brown with cool tones, such as burgundy or mahogany—your hair will still be a rich red, but without the brass.

If you want to go jet black:

Jet black is a serious commitment, because once you color hair black it's very difficult to go lighter. If you want the freedom to change your color frequently, try chocolate brown instead.

According to Julia Youssef, vice president of L'Oréal's Technical Center, where each new L'Oréal color is tested on hundreds of women, you should also take your skin tone into account when choosing a color:

- *If you have a slightly red or ruddy complexion:* Steer clear of dyes with reddish tones. For example, if you're going blonde, avoid warm strawberry blonde and stick with an ashy whitish blonde instead.
- *If you have olive skin:* Dark auburn and mahogany shades are very flattering on you. If you have gray hair and olive skin, try a warm light brown.
- *If you have a very warm complexion (yellow tones in your skin):* Try auburn or coppery red. If you're graying, try a beige blonde.
- *If you have a neutral complexion:* You can wear any hue—experiment!

Picking a Product

There are thousands of haircolor formulas out there—picking one can get confusing. Here's a guide to the most popular types:

Semi-permanent color ("Level 1") such as Clairol Loving Care is generally less damaging to hair than permanent dye, but lasts through fewer shampoos. It contains no ammonia, so you can't use it to lighten your hair.

"Soft" permanent color ("Level 2") lines such as L'Oréal's Open and Clairol's Natural Instincts are advertised as milder, botanically based "color boosters." In general, they are less damaging than permanent color because they contain low amounts of ammonia and/or peroxide. But make no mistake—they are permanent. In some cases the color lasts longer than "Level 3" dyes. They can lighten hair, but not drastically.

Permanent color ("Level 3") such as L'Oréal's Preference and Clairol's Nice 'n Easy usually contains ammonia and/or peroxide, allowing you to lighten your hair and to keep your color longer.

Highlighting kits. Many haircolors promise "natural" highlights, but you can't achieve salon-quality color variation with a single-process dye. Products such as L'Oréal's Fera, which advertise "prismatic color," actually give hair a high shine that looks like highlights. For true multitoneal highlights, use an at-home highlighting kit like L'Oréal's Couleur Experte or Clairol Hair Painting. A tip from L'Oréal's Julia Youssef: "These kits are quite user-friendly, but start with fewer highlights. You can always add more later."

Gentry recommends using semi-permanent color at first, because it means less commitment. I decided to cover my old blonde highlights with a warm brown and add chunky blonde streaks in the front. We went to Sally's Beauty Supply and chose:

- Wella's Color Charm Semi-Permanent Hair Color in Medium Sandy Gold (\$4.30)
- Wella's Color Charm Activating Lotion (\$3.11) (Most drugstore kits include activating lotion in the box; Wella's is sold separately.)
- L'Oréal's Chunking Blocks of Highlights (\$12.49)

Buddying Up

Gentry encourages enlisting a "hair-color buddy" to help apply the dye at home. Two things you and your friend should know before the big day:

1. Prewashing: If you're using a semi-permanent color, your hair should be freshly washed. If you're using a permanent color, your hair should be a little dirty—one or two days since washing. The lighter you're going, the dirtier you want your hair to be. The "dirt" is actually a layer of protective natural oil that can help prevent the color from damaging your scalp.

2. Patch test: To make sure the color won't irritate your skin, rub a small, nickel-sized amount on the inside of your elbow. Then put a bandage over it and wait twenty-four hours. If your skin looks and feels fine when you remove the bandage, you're ready to go.



step 1 MIX COLOR

In a plastic bowl, Gentry thoroughly mixed 1 part Wella Color Charm Semi-Permanent Hair Color to 2 parts Wella Color Charm Activating Lotion. (These instructions are on the Wella bottles.)



step 2 TEST STRAND

"It's absolutely crucial to test the color on a strand before coloring the rest of your hair," says Gentry, "not just to see how the shade will turn out, but also so you can see if the color shows up evenly along the shaft."

Is It OK to Spray?

Spray-in hair lighteners such as Sun-In or John Frieda's Sun Streaks are effective primarily for naturally fair-haired women. If you have dark hair, spray-in products usually result in orangy tones.

Roots and Tips

"The biggest mistake women make when coloring at home," says Youseff, "is re-coloring their whole head when they really only need to do the roots." The result is often overdyed, fake-looking color. If the root end of your strand test looks lighter or darker than the tip, apply the color at the roots first, giving it five extra minutes to sink in.



step 3 SECTION OFF HAIR

To ensure that the color is distributed evenly, have your buddy section your hair into four parts, knotting each in a loose bun and pinning it into place with a clip. If you're going for chunky highlights, pull out those sections and clip separately.



step 4 APPLY BASE COLOR

Gentry applied the main color with a tint brush (\$3, folica.com), working it through my hair in 2"-wide sections. These reusable brushes offer far greater control than just applying product directly from a bottle. Note: If you're adding chunky highlights later, you *do not* need to apply any base color to the sections you've separated for highlighting.



step 5 MIX HIGHLIGHTS

While my main color set, Gentry started on my highlights. In the second plastic bowl, she mixed the Lightening Powder and Crème Developer included in the L'Oréal Chunking package.



step 6 APPLY FOIL HIGHLIGHTS

Rather than using the shower cap included in the package, Gentry opted for aluminum foil to isolate the highlighted sections. Foiling is easier than you think—if you have a friend's help. You can use standard tinfoil cut into 10" squares. Lay the sections of the hair to be highlighted flat on a square of foil; then brush the product onto the hair using your tint brush. (Note: Highlighting products can burn your skin, so make sure you don't apply them directly onto your scalp.) Fold the foil into a square around the hair and move on to the next section. The size of the sections of hair on each piece of foil will depend on whether you want chunky highlights (in which case you'll want to do 1" sections) or a subtler look.



step 7 WAIT IT OUT

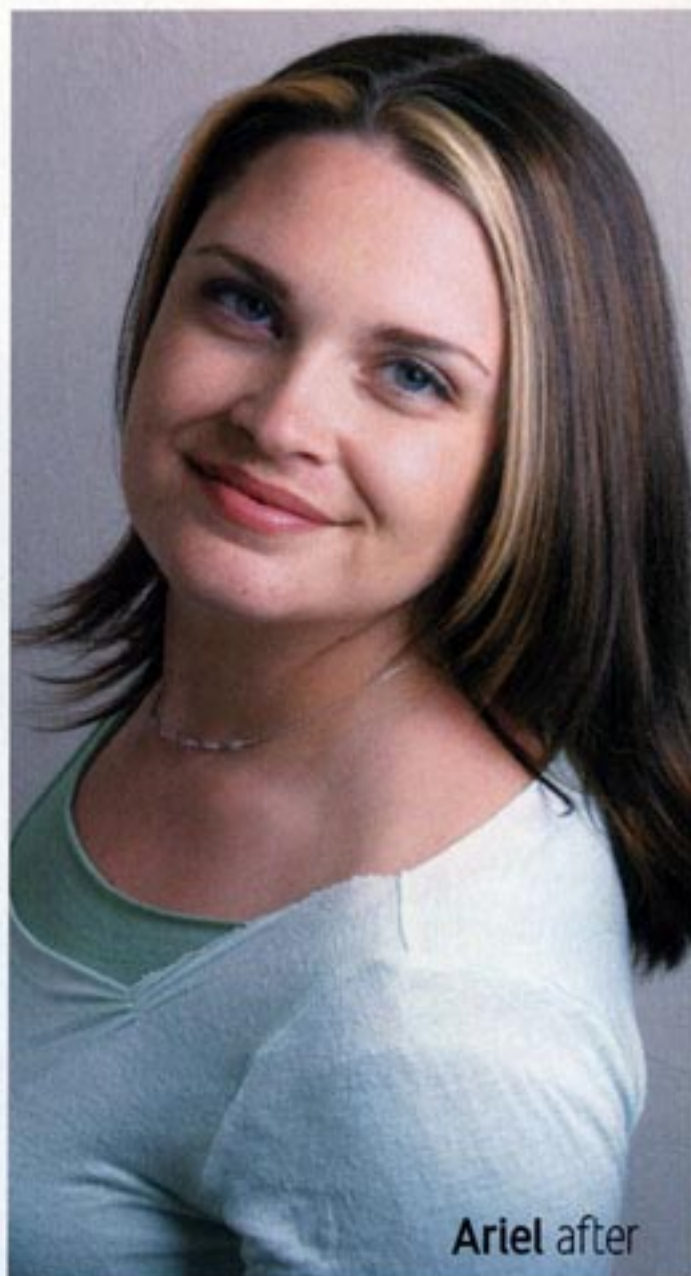
Youssef says you should always leave the haircolor on for the amount of time listed on the package. "These products are tested and retested on hundreds of women," she explains. "If you take them off too early, your color won't look right, and if you leave them on too long, you can damage your hair."



step 8 RELAX AND RINSE

Rinse all chemicals out of your hair thoroughly; if you leave dyes or highlighters in, they can damage your scalp. With careful washing, your new haircolor should last for two months or more. "It's important to use shampoos labeled 'color-treated' or 'chemically treated,'" Gentry explains. "Gentle" cleansers such as baby shampoo can strip your color. Most salon shampoos are safe, says Gentry; she also recommends the drugstore brands TRESemmé, L'Oréal and the Color Revival line from Pantene.

“It’s been weeks since my home dye job, and my hair still looks great. Learning how to color at home was empowering, and when my roots start to show, I’ll know how to deal with them. I’m still a haircolor addict, but now I’ve got beautiful hair and I’m not breaking the bank.”



Ariel after

Tips From the Top

Giselle, Clairol’s color consultant, answered the four questions we were dyeing to ask.

1. What’s the biggest mistake people make during the home haircoloring process?

Choosing the wrong shade. You can’t just assume you’ll achieve the color on the box. You have to do the equation: The color on the box plus your color equals the final result.

2. What’s your most popular shade?

Nice ‘n Easy #98, Natural Extra Light Neutral Blonde.

3. What’s the strangest question anyone has asked the Clairol Personal Consultant help line?

A woman once requested advice on the best way to color her dog’s hair so it would match her own.

4. What can you do if the result looks awful?

If your experiment goes terribly wrong, wash your hair immediately with dishwashing detergent, which will get out more of the color than shampoo will. Professional beauty supply stores sell products that remove permanent hair color—if you’re a beginner and you’re trying something risky, you might want to have one of these products around.

Calling for Backup

Get a stylist’s help if:

- You want to go platinum blonde (“movie-star blonde,” as Gentry calls it).
- You want corrective color—making a drastic change to already dyed hair, such as lightening a dark dyed shade. For example, you might have gone a deep red during the winter, but now want to add blonde highlights for summer.
- You have very long hair that you want to lighten. Coloring long hair is time-consuming and difficult, especially if you’re going blonde, which is tricky to pull off at home even with shorter hair.



Victoria Gentry is the founder of Seattle’s Vain salon and boutique. She began her career by coloring and styling her own hair and that of a few brave friends in New York City in the early ‘80s. Following intensive training at the Artist Academy in New Jersey, Victoria took her expertise west to Seattle, where she opened Vain in 1996. Now, as the owner and manager of a successful salon, Victoria remains dedicated to a do-it-yourself attitude; Vain has always carried at-home haircoloring products.