



S O L A R F A S T
Sun Printed Summer Dress

By: Tanya Alexander



Being an artist means that nothing in my closet is safe. I'm either inadvertently dripping paint or dye on whatever I happen to be wearing, or I am eyeing certain pieces thinking of ways to get crafty.

In this case, I'd purchased a white dress on impulse during the winter (it had pockets, and I love pockets), knowing full well there was no way it would remain crisp white for long, either by accident or by design.

Rather than risk the inevitable stains, I decided to take matters into my own crafty hands: inspired by harvesting some garden lavender, I decided to do a little summer sun printing with SolarFast.



Materials:

- **White dress for dyeing**
Local thrift stores are a great resource, however garments may show signs of wear, and you need to make sure the fiber content is comprised mainly of natural fibers (cotton or hemp is ideal for fabric). I sourced my project dress (95% cotton and 5% spandex, 100% awesome pockets) from Amazon - [CLICK HERE](#) for link, or search “HUHOT white dress.”
- **Jacquard’s [SolarFast Dyes](#)**
I chose Red, Teal and Blue. I recommend limiting your palette to three colors that work well together. It’s helpful to do a swatch test with sun exposure to determine finished colors.
- **Jacquard’s [Dye Applicator Bottles \(any size\)](#)**
These bottles (one per dye color) make dyeing a snap! They have good capacity and convenient, screw-on spout tops for controlled color placement.
- **Jacquard’s [SolarFast Wash](#)**
This recommended auxiliary is used to wash out excess dye and retain a bright color result for your project.
- **Rubber Bands**
These are needed if you’ll be doing any tie dye patterning; I tie dyed the top of my project.
- **Paper Towels**
Great for inevitable clean ups.
- **Gloves**
Gloves are a must when doing dye projects.
- **Fresh or dried leaves, plants or flowers**
A variety of shapes and sizes yields the best sun printing results.
- **A clean towel**
This will protect the surface you lay your project on while sun printing.



LEFT: Most of the items needed to make this simple, fun project.

RIGHT: A crisp, clean white cotton dress (with pockets!), just begging for some sun printed color.



Project Steps

1. Determine what kind of patterning you want for the dye base. For my project, I chose to do a tie dye treatment for the top/bodice and a graduated color banding treatment for the skirt.

TIP: Doing a rough sketch on paper can help you visualize the end result.

2. Soak your pre-washed dress in water, and wring out the excess. Your dress should be a bit more than damp but not heavy dripping wet. For this project, you will want to work “wet / wet” (wet fabric base with wet dyes).

The wet fabric base means that less dye will be required to penetrate the fabric (because the fibers already contain moisture). The wet base also ensures that the dye spreads more evenly into the fibers of the fabric for a more evenly saturated end color result.

3. Prepare your SolarFast Dyes as follows:

- Put those gloves on!
- Shake bottles of dye well before opening.
- Fill each dye applicator bottle with about 1" of water (as shown).
- Add SolarFast Dye to applicator bottle until each bottle is about 3" full (as shown).
- Screw-on the applicator cap. Placing a gloved finger over the top, shake each bottle until the contents are mixed (slightly diluted dyes penetrate the fabric better for tie dyeing).

NOTE: Mixed dye doesn't indicate final color.



LEFT: Fill applicator bottles with about 1" of water.

ABOVE: Add SolarFast Dye to bottle until contents are about 3" full.



4. Use rubber bands to bind any parts of your project where you want to have a tie dye effect.

There are several methods of dye binding out there... [CLICK HERE](#) to browse through some technique videos (featuring Jacquard's Procion MX and using classic tie dyeing techniques).

For my project, I went with a "Z-fold" (also: "pleat fold," "fan fold" or "zig-zag fold") for the shoulder straps (shown top right photo).

Once in place, I curled the strap in half like a "C" (shown 2nd right photo) and secured them with several moderately-tensioned rubber bands (shown 3rd right photo).

With the straps secured, I "Z-folded" the bodice, using vertical folds across the width (shown bottom left photo).

Lastly, I secured these folds with rubber bands from top bottom, ending up with a vertical length of bands, with the two shoulder strap bundles at the top (shown bottom right photo).



LEFT: Z-folding the shoulder straps.



RIGHT: Curling the folded strap into a "C"



LEFT: Securing the folded and curled straps with rubber bands.



ABOVE: "Z-folding" the dress bodice with vertical pleats, horizontally across the bodice front.



ABOVE: Dress bodice folds secured with rubber bands from top to bottom, with shoulder strap bundles.

5. The next step is dyeing the bodice. Visualization is important when using these dyes. The dyes themselves are not yet UV cured, so in-bottle they often look nothing like the final result.

TIP: An easy way to keep track of your colors: simply write the color name on a piece of masking tape and stick it to the bottle.

In a sink (or on a protected surface), selectively apply your first dye color (Red, which appears pale pink), concentrating more dye on areas you want a brighter color result.

Repeat this process with the 2nd color (Blue, which appears almost clear like water).

Finish by applying your 3rd color (Teal, which appears yellow in the photo).

SOME HELPFUL TIPS:

- Similar to tie dyeing, you'll want to work the color into bound areas to achieve a good contrast of color and base fabric color.
- It is perfectly fine to overlap areas of colors; however, keep in mind that these are translucent colors, so you will get blends of colors. A little color theory: red and blue (both being Primary colors) will result in Secondary shades of violet and purple. Red and teal, however, are a bit more complicated: red is a Primary color, but teal is actually a complex color, a combination of a Primary (blue) and a Secondary (green); therefore, the result may vary between a more neutralized earthy hue of darker green, golden-green or even brownish.
- Trust the process: be OK with color shifts and the looseness of the technique.

If you want more control: brush on undiluted SolarFast dye (rather than the bottle method), or use [SolarFast Thickener](#) to increase viscosity for an even more controlled application (great for stenciling or screenprinting).



ABOVE: Applying Red SolarFast dye (which uncured appears pale pink) to the bound shoulder strap bundles, concentrating on the bound areas.



ABOVE: Applying Blue SolarFast dye (which uncured appears nearly clear) to the bound bodice area. I dyed isolated areas as well as some areas overlapping the Red, to achieve some violet tones.



ABOVE: Applying Teal SolarFast dye (which uncured appears yellow) to remaining areas of the dress top, concentrating on remaining open areas with some overlap on the blue areas.

6. For the skirt, I wanted a looser, more graduated color dip look. I thought that the more solid color bands would work well with the sun printing of the flowers (for a stronger contrast result).



LEFT: Applying the first band of color (Red), allowing the dye drops to “travel” past the intended placement area.

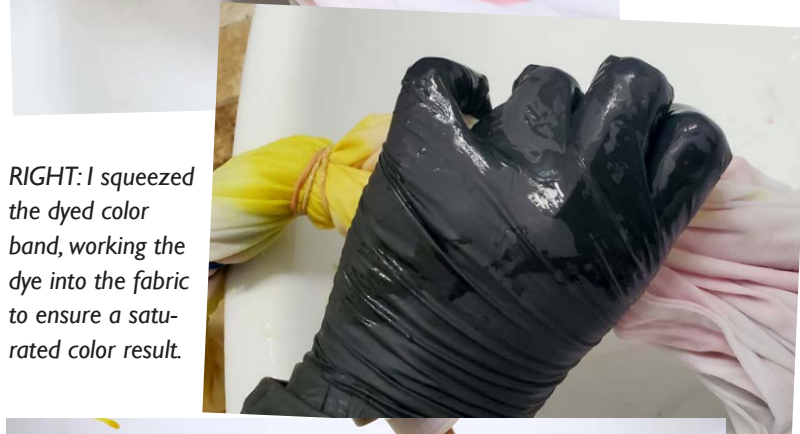
Starting at the last colored area of the bodice (at the waist), I generously applied Red to a band of the skirt about the width of my hand. I allowed the dye to “run” down a bit past that width (the skirt was laid at an angle in the sink for that purpose).

Once the area was fairly saturated, I squeezed the dyed area with my gloved hand to work the dye into the fabric.

I continued working from waist to hem, alternating bands of Red, Blue and Teal, allowing only slight spacing between the dyed bands of color.

Then, I’d come back and squeeze the area between the two dyed bands, working the dyed areas together to achieve color blends.

As the bottles got close to empty, I’d spatter the remaining dye randomly across the skirt, to achieve a splattered color effect.



RIGHT: I squeezed the dyed color band, working the dye into the fabric to ensure a saturated color result.



ABOVE: The Blue is so close to clear it really isn’t very visible, but there is actually quite a lot of it between the Red (pale pink) and the Teal (yellowish). Note the spattering of Teal dye drips above and below the band,



ABOVE: Dyed skirt overview. The “clear” area between the Red (pink) and Teal (yellow) is actually Blue.

7. Remove all of the rubber bands from the bodice and shoulder straps (shown left). You’ll want your project unbound for sun printing, so that all dyed areas get UV exposure (to process the dye to the final intended color, instead of the unprocessed dye color).



8. Next, you need to prepare the items you'll be using for sun printing your project. I wanted a botanical theme for this dress, so I snipped and gathered a variety of cuttings from plants around my yard: some lavender (from live and (sadly) one dead plant), bamboo shoots, random tree leaves, grass shoots, butterfly bush and anything else I thought was interesting and added a variety of shapes and sizes.



I chose to sun print using plants; however, with sun printing, you can literally use anything that casts a shadow! Some things I've successfully sun printed with: piles of buttons or rubber bands, pencils and paint brushes, spools of thread, strands of yarn, lace, paper clips, clothespins, little toy army guys, plastic insects, even my hands (if you're patient enough to sit still while the sun works its magic).

Some fun options: you can use a [Jacquard Film Marker](#) and draw designs on [SolarFast Film](#). You can also print film negatives from your inkjet printer onto [SolarFast Film](#) and sun print photos on your project. This is one of those mediums that is wide open to all sorts of crafty possibilities.

9. Successful sun printing requires two important things:
- A sunny day with moderate to high UV exposure ([CLICK HERE](#) to check daily UV exposure levels for your location).
 - A fully exposed location (meaning no shade, full sun without trees or objects filtering or casting shade).

Before printing, you'll want to check the SolarFast Dye bottles to determine the recommended exposure times. On the back label, look for the full sun icon for the recommended exposure time for a sunny day (the cloudy icon refers to recommended exposure time for overcast days). With the colors I chose, Teal had the longest recommended exposure time (12 minutes), so I knew I'd be timing the printing process for 12 minutes TWICE (project front and back).



ABOVE: Checking the recommended exposure times. The center bottle (Teal) had the longest time at 12 minutes for sunny days, which determined the exposure time for my project (front and back).

10. Prepare for sun printing by laying out a clean towel in your sunny location and placing your plant cuttings (or other objects) close by. Then, go back inside and grab your project. Quickly spread it out and place your plants (or objects) on the dyed areas for best contrast. You will notice that the dyed areas will immediately start to process as soon as they are exposed to sunlight, so it is important you move quickly to place your objects for best contrast result.



ABOVE: Front of dress with plant cuttings placed on top. It only took me a minute or two to get things set up, but you can see in just that short amount of time how quickly the dyes started to change when exposed to the sun. Full exposure time was 12 minutes.

If you'd rather avoid the object placement scramble, you can set up your project and object placement indoors, then walk out the whole thing to your sunny location ready to go. I like the randomness of the mad dash, it keeps things interesting. :-)

If you're using film negatives: you'll definitely want to get things set up indoors first, and place a piece of clear glass on top of your negative for the best exposure result.

I set my timer for 12 minutes (as determined in Step 9), and had myself a glass of lemonade (it was a crispy 101°F out!)



11. After the initial 12 minute exposure, I shook off the cuttings, flipped the dress over and quickly set up the cuttings on the dyed areas on the back side of the dress. I then reset my timer for another 12 minute exposure. →



After the 2nd exposure, I shook off the cuttings, and noted a couple of areas that had been hidden during the timed exposures (left).

I simply opened up the dress (so that the underexposed areas were visible) and watched those areas expose until I was satisfied with the color result.

12. After the underexposed areas were the color I wanted, I took the project back inside to complete the process.

SolarFast Dyes won't stop developing until they are properly washed out of the fabric... a simple rinse and wear is **not** recommended!

With still gloved hands, I filled a sink with hot water. Then, I added a couple capfuls of SolarFast Wash, submerged my dress project and agitated for several minutes (until I had a nice froth of bubbly goodness).



Then, I drained the sink, wringing out the dress multiple times in clean water until the water being squeezed out of the dress ran clear. After washing and rinsing, I hung up my dress to air dry.

Alternatively, you can machine wash your project, but I am not a fan of this for two reasons:

- With current California drought conditions, I didn't want to run the dress in a small wash cycle (and didn't have a load of dark laundry to run).
- Cotton + hot water = potential fabric shrinkage. This dress fits me perfectly, and I didn't want to risk it becoming shorter or smaller.

Finished Project



DRESS FRONT

DRESS BACK



SUN PRINT PATTERN CLOSEUPS



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SolarFast-Sun-Printed-Summer-Dress_Tanya-Alexander

ABOUT THE ARTIST: Hello, my name is Tanya Alexander. I am a Graphic / Web Designer at Jacquard Products. I'm also a lifelong fine artist working in a variety of mediums, including: traditional acrylic canvas work, pen and ink, ceramics, textile art, face/body painting, large format muraling and artistic neo-traditional tattooing. I've enjoyed experimenting with a wide variety of new mediums while working at Jacquard, including Silk Colors, Piñata Alcohol Inks, Textile Color, Lumiere, Neopaque, Pearl Ex Powdered Pigments, Cyanotype, Indigo, SolarFast, Procion MX, Versatex and more! You can find me and my work on Instagram: @artbytanyaalexander. —

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