

Anyone for tea?

LOW-TECH DYE ADDS SUBTLE AGE
AND WON'T BLOTCH

BY SEAN CLARKE



You may have heard of food-safe finishes, but how many finishes are safe as food? My guess is not many. There is one such product lurking in the kitchen. The humble teabag not only revives me after a long day in the shop, but it also serves as an inexpensive, easily available, and environmentally friendly dye.

Tea imparts an attractive warm, golden color that can be built up with additional coats with no loss of clarity. I've found that white oak, maple (both regular and tiger), and pine all benefit from this dye. It is particularly useful on pine, a wood prone to blotching, since the weak consistency and finer color particles of the tea stain tend not to collect in the blotch-prone areas.

Brew it, brush it, seal it in

The color and density produced by different brands of tea varies significantly, so do a little experimenting on sample boards first. I have tried different brands and blends (as dyes and drinks), including Lipton, Royal World Indian green tea, Tetley's British

Blend, and PG Tips. While green tea produces too weak a dye, my favorite brew is to combine 12 oz. of hot water and six PG Tips tea bags in a plastic container and allow it to sit overnight.

Sand all the surfaces at P150-grit followed with P220-grit paper. To raise the grain before the application of the water-based dye, wet the surface with distilled water, allow two to four hours of drying time, and then resand with P220-grit paper to remove the whiskers.

Apply the tea using an artificial-bristle brush (the kind recommended for latex paint). Allow the stain to soak in for a few minutes, wipe off any excess with a cotton cloth, and then allow one to two hours of drying time. If a deeper color is required, repeat the application and when dry, lightly sand with P320-grit paper to dull any raised grain.

I like to seal in the dye before applying a topcoat, especially

Many woods respond

The lighter the wood, the greater the change imparted by tea. Among the woods that respond best are pine, regular maple, tiger maple, and white oak.



Instant antique. The cool, pale look of fresh-milled pine is transformed into warm, antique country pine using a dye stain made from regular tea bags.

HOW TO USE IT

Strong brew.

The strength of the dye is up to you, but Clarke uses a recipe of 12 oz. hot water to six tea bags. Keep the paper tags out of the liquid.



Raise the grain. Wipe the whole surface with a wet cloth and let the wood dry for two to four hours. After the wood has dried, the surface will feel rough. Lightly sand it with P220-grit paper and remove the dust. The surface can now receive the water-based dye without swelling up.

if it is water based, as this can reactivate the dye. Brush on two coats of a dewaxed blond shellac such as SealCoat. Allow the sealer to dry for at least four hours and then sand with P220-grit paper.

If you want the piece to have a subtly darker color, you can tint the clear coat. You can add dye concentrates such as TransTints to many finishes, but if you are using a water-based finish you can continue using tea. Add one part of the tea stain to five parts of finish and stir, but be sure to read the directions on the can, because some water-based finishes have limits as to how much they can be diluted. If you are happy with the color of the piece, simply apply two or three clear coats of your choice, such as more shellac, lacquer, or polyurethane in either solvent or water-based form. Then, if you want a low-luster look, rub the surface with 0000 steel wool and apply a thin coat of paste wax before buffing the surface with a soft cotton cloth.

After all that, you'll have earned that cup of tea.



Apply the dye. Use an artificial-bristle brush to apply the tea stain liberally. After a few minutes, wipe away any surface moisture with a clean cloth. Repeat if you want a deeper color.

SEAL BEFORE TOPCOATING



Lock it in. Before topcoating, seal the surface with a couple of coats of dewaxed shellac.

FOR MORE COLOR



Milky tea? If you want to add more color to the piece, you can add some of your tea mix to a clear water-based finish. Then brush on two or three coats to protect and further darken the workpiece.

