

# It's to Dye For!

By Peggy Gill

Most of us today recall the fad of tie-dyed garments of the 1960's. But when I came across an ad on page 23 of the October 1929 *Needlecraft-The Magazine of Home Arts* for RIT Dye, the picture (see page 2) and some of the fine print caught my eye. The headline in the ad states, "A New Discovery in Tinting Hosiery and Lingerie." Was this truly a new discovery in 1929? Based on my research, I would suggest that dyeing or tinting garments was not a new concept in the Model A era.

Some online research led me to more information than I ever wanted to know about tie-dyeing, but I did pick up a few tidbits of history for this product which is still available today.



Rit. Tinte para textiles. Envase de cartón. Medios del XX. Colección MODO 0

According to a query from Nancy Andersen from Oceanside, CA, at a website that specializes in vintage advertising ([www.pzrservices.typepad.com/vintageadvertising/](http://www.pzrservices.typepad.com/vintageadvertising/)) her "grandfather's sister is the inventor of RIT Dye. Her name was Christina Andersen and she taught dry cleaning in Europe and the United States." According to Andersen, family history says that the original name for the product was "Eyvin Colorito," (Eyvin was her father's cousin.) Ms. Andersen's father's parents were from Copenhagen, Denmark, and her

grandfather's sister was not able to renew the original patent rights. According to the Annual Report for the 1910 US Patent Office, a patent for "Soap for Washing and Dyeing" was filed under the Eyvin Colorito name by S. Andersen in NY, NY.

However, according to the website for RIT Dye, entrepreneur Charles C. Huffman began experimenting with fabric dyes just before World War I, and in 1917 developed RIT Dye, named after the financial backer and first Vice President Louis L Rittenhouse. A vintage RIT Dye box found in Wikipedia lists a patent date of 1926. But from the date in the vintage ad pictured to the right, we know RIT Dye was around as far back as 1919. The copyright date on the bottom of the ad says "Sunbeam Chemical Co. 1919."



1919 Ad from the collection at Gatochy's Blog

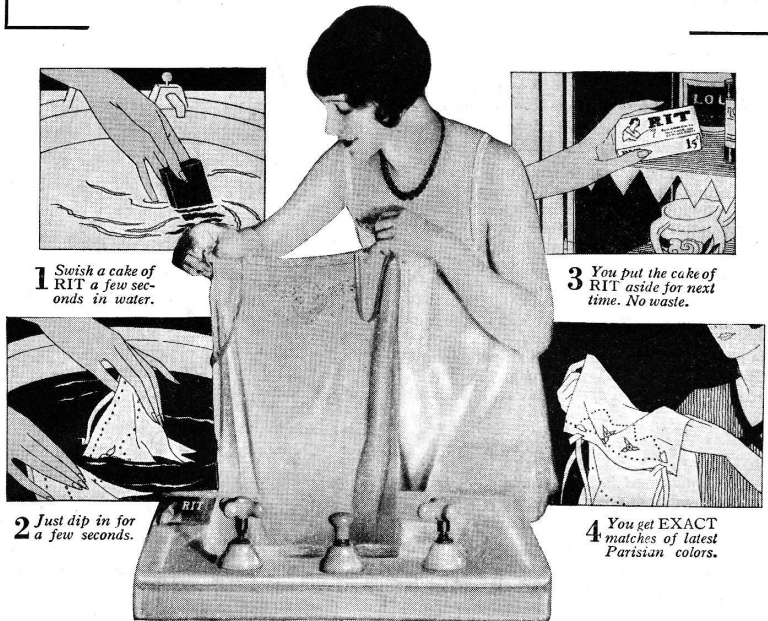
What caught my eye in this 1929 advertisement is the step-by-step picture directions, as well as the fine print (not shown) in the ad that stated that by using the dye you could get the exact colors of the current fashion trends from France. I imagine this was something all women envied or would strive to emulate in the Model A era, especially as money was tight after the stock market crash of 1929.

This ad from 1929 refers to a “cake” of RIT. “You just 'swish' a cake of RIT in a basin of warm water a few seconds. Then put the cake aside for next time. ...You can do 10 pairs of stockings, 5-6 step-ins or a whole frock in a few minutes.”

Today’s product is either in powder or liquid form. However, like today’s product, this ad also recommended using “White RIT to remove the stains and color from fabrics,” as well as “for professional results in home tinting or dyeing always remove old color first” before dyeing.

# A New Discovery in Tinting Hosiery and Lingerie

*A New, Far Quicker, Easier and Simpler Way*



**NO STREAKS...NO DYE SPOTS...NO MUSS OR FUSS**

The earlier ad from 1919 states, “Don’t buy new...” Well, obviously, if we are hunting for original era fashions today it is not going to be new. I have come across many garments as well as undergarments in wearable condition only to find that they are stained or faded to a mottled tint and not really useable for judging purposes. So apparently women in the Model A era remade and rejuvenated tired and worn clothing. Hmmm....It may be worth a try with a garment that will otherwise sit in a box of unusable items.

So, that is exactly what I set out to do. Below are some pictures of a cotton step-in chemise I found that was in great condition, except for some discoloration at the bottom of the right leg opening and on the left side back. It is difficult to see the stains in these pictures due to the sheerness of the voile. Following the directions above, I first used the “White RIT” to remove the old color. The garment turned a beautiful pale yellow with a cream colored trim. There is still some slight visible staining on the back side, but against my skin it disappears completely. I decided to stop here on the step-in chemise because it came out so nice.

BEFORE



AFTER





My second item was a shawl that was stained with, I believe rust. After unsuccessfully trying every treatment I could find that guaranteed to remove rust and blood, I treated this once gray shawl to the same "White RIT" bath. The "White RIT" removed the gray, but didn't remove the rust. Having nothing to lose, I dyed it black. As far as I can see, the stains are no longer discernible. However, in sunlight, the black does not look as black as I had hoped for. Below are the results:

## BEFORE



## AFTER



I love perusing the old Model A era magazines. Not only do many of them contain illustrations of the latest fashion styles of the day, but many of the advertisements offer tidbits of practical advice that are as pertinent today as they were over 80 years ago!

