



Color Wheel Basics

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made to create

Color Wheel

Any color system can be organized in hue (color) order in the shape of a circle or wheel. Once organized in a color wheel, relationships and harmonies between colors become easy to see. A color wheel can be used to help you find coordinating fabric colors or inspire new combinations of colors for quilting and sewing projects.

CMY

The initials of the partitive color system or printer's color wheel—Cyan, Magenta and Yellow. These are the three primary, parent, or stand-alone colors in the system which mix together to make all the other colors in the wheel.

Cool colors

Colors around a color wheel can be divided into two halves; cool and warm colors. Blues, greens and violets are described as cool, calming colors that recede into the background. They are cool, crisp, soothing, and passive.



Hue

Hue is another word for a specific color that is different from other colors. For instance, the difference between a red hue and a green hue. Some hues can be described by two color names, like red-orange or blue-green.

Primary

Primary colors within a color wheel are the three parent or stand-alone colors combined to make all the other colors in the wheel. These colors cannot be mixed or made from any of the other colors in the system.



RGB

The initials of the additive system of light and human color perception Red, Green and Blue. These are the three primary, parent, or stand-alone colors in this system which mix together to make all the other colors in the RGB wheel.

RYB

The initials of the subtractive artist's or traditional color system Red, Yellow and Blue. These are the three primary, parent, or stand-alone colors in this system which mix together to make all the other colors in the RYB wheel.



Saturation

The intensity or purity of a hue. A color is fully saturated when it is at full strength with no white, black, or shades of gray added to it. Fully saturated hues can be strong and vibrant compared to the same color dulled with white, black, or gray. For instance, a fully saturated red will not have any hints of white, black, or gray added to it. A red that has some white added to create a softer red (think carnation pink) is lower in saturation because the purity of the red color is not as strong.

Secondary

A color produced by mixing any two primary hues in a system together in equal proportions.

Shade

Any hue mixed with black. Hues that are shaded are low in saturation (the intensity of the color is dampened by black) and appear to be darker in value. For instance, adding black to red will result in a dark, reddish-brown color; adding black to blue will result in a very deep, dark blue.

Tertiary

A color produced by mixing one secondary hue with one primary hue in equal proportions.





Tint

Any hue mixed with white. Hues that are tinted are low in saturation (the intensity of the color is dampened by white) and appear to be lighter in value. Most of the colors we call pastels are hues tinted with white. For instance, a light tint of green (think pastel mint), a light tint of blue (think baby blue) or a light tint of yellow (think butter yellow).

Tone

Any hue mixed with gray. Hues that are toned with gray appear low in saturation (the intensity of the color is dampened by gray), and can be either lighter or darker in value depending on how much white is contained in the gray tone.



Value

The lightness or darkness of a color, regardless of hue. In a color wheel yellow appears as hue with the lightest value, and violet appears as hue with the darkest value. It can be important to know the value of the fabrics you are working with, especially when making a quilt that calls for a mix of light, medium and dark hues. When determining the value of your fabrics, try looking through a green or red colored film to better determine the lightness or darkness, or take a picture with your mobile phone at the black and white setting.

Warm Colors

Colors around a color wheel can be divided into two halves; warm and cool colors. Reds, oranges and yellows are described as warm, vibrant colors that pop out and grab your attention. They are vibrant, stimulating, motivating, and aggressive.