

toning shampoo

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Toning Shampoo

Purple shampoo, blue shampoo, green shampoo — washes carrying a complementary pigment to cancel an unwanted tone. It is the best-selling product in hair colour maintenance and the one most often misused, because the mechanism is a **colour-wheel trick, not a cleaning or a lightening one**.

The complementary principle

Opposite colours on the wheel neutralise each other toward grey. Depositing a small amount of the opposite hue makes the unwanted one less visible.

Unwanted tone	Where it comes from	Pigment that cancels it
Yellow / brassy in blonde	Underlying warm pigment exposed by lightening	Violet / purple
Orange in light brown and brunette	Lightening stopped at the orange stage	Blue
Red in dark brown and black	Underlying red pigment	Green
Yellow-orange in dark blonde	Between the two stages	Blue-violet

Which one you need is decided by **how dark the hair is**, because lifting hair passes through the same sequence of underlying warmth — red, red-orange, orange, orange-yellow, yellow, pale yellow — and where you stopped determines what shows.

What it cannot do

- **It cannot lighten.** Toning deposits; it never lifts. Hair that is too dark needs [Hair Lightener](#).
- **It cannot fix badly lifted hair.** A cool pigment over a bright orange base makes muddy brown, not ash.
- **It cannot work on hair with no exposed warmth.** Toning virgin dark hair does essentially nothing.

Over-toning, and how to undo it

The characteristic failure: **purple shampoo left on too long, or used too often, on very porous blonde hair**, producing a grey, dull, lilac or blue-grey cast. Bleached hair is highly porous and grabs pigment fast.

The rules that prevent it:

- **Once or twice a week at most**, not every wash.
- **Two to three minutes**, timed, not "while I shower".
- **Dilute it** with a plain shampoo or conditioner if the hair is very light or very porous.
- **Apply to wet hair**, which slows the deposit; applying to dry hair intensifies it dramatically.

To remove an over-toned cast: a **clarifying shampoo**, once or twice, and time. Do not try to correct it with more toner.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic — FDA primary category **(07) hair colouring preparations**.

These are **direct dyes** — Acid Violet 43, Basic Violet 2, HC Blue 2 and relatives — not coal-tar oxidation dyes, so they generally do **not** shelter under the coal-tar hair dye exemption and are subject to the ordinary **colour additive requirements**: approved for the intended use, and certified colours from **FDA-certified batches**.

PPD is absent, which makes toning shampoos usable by many people who cannot use permanent colour.

In the EU, direct dyes are assessed by the SCCS and listed with concentration limits in **Annex III**; **methylisothiazolinone is capped at 15 ppm in rinse-off** products and prohibited in leave-on ones.

Shelf life

12–18 months after opening. The shampoo base is robust; the **dye degrades first**, so an old bottle washes normally and tones progressively less. That is decline, not spoilage.

Gloves are worth using — violet pigment stains hands and nails — and the shower should be rinsed straight away, because these stain grout and silicone seals permanently.

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- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Depositing washes* — [Colour-Depositing Conditioner](#) · [Colour-Depositing Shampoo](#).
- [Hair Bleach](#) — where the brass comes from in the first place.
- [Colour Corrector](#) — the same colour-wheel logic, on skin.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.