

Colors

Spanish for Beginners

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Like other adjectives, names of the common colors when used in Spanish must agree with the nouns they describe in both gender and number. However, names of some of the more unusual colors are treated differently in Spanish than they are in English. Also, in most cases, names of colors come after the nouns they describe, not before as in English.

Here are some common colors:

- **amarillo** — yellow
- **anaranjado** — orange
- **azul** — blue
- **blanco** — white
- **dorado** — golden
- **gris** — gray
- **marrón** — brown
- **negro** — black
- **púrpura** — purple
- **rojo** — red
- **rosado** — pink
- **verde** — green



Which color?

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Note that the form changes depending on the number and gender of what's being described: *Tengo un coche **amarillo***. (I have one **yellow** car.) *Tiene dos coches **amarillos***. (He has two **yellow** cars.) *Tienes una flor **amarilla***. (You have a **yellow** flower.) *Tenemos diez flores **amarillas***. (We have ten **yellow** flowers.)

Colors in the two languages don't always match up exactly. "Brown," in particular, can also be expressed by *castaño*, *moreno* or *pardo*, depending on the shade and what is being described. *Morado* also is commonly used for "purple."

As does English, Spanish also allows numerous nouns to be used as colors. However, the way in which they are used as colors varies depending on the region and the preferences of the speaker. For example, the word *café* means "coffee" and, as in English, can be used to describe a shade of brown. Possible ways to describe a coffee-colored shirt include *camisa de color café*, *camisa color de café*, *camisa color café* and *camisa café*.

Here are some nouns that are commonly used in this way as colors, although numerous others can be used:

- **beige**, **beis** — beige
- **cereza** — cherry-colored
- **chocolate** — chocolate-colored
- **esmeralda** — emerald
- **grana** — dark red
- **humo** — smoky
- **lila** — lilac
- **malva** — mauve
- **mostaza** — mustard-colored
- **naranja** — orange
- **oro** — gold
- **paja** — straw-colored
- **rosa** — pink
- **turquesa** — turquoise
- **violeta** — violet

Note for intermediate students: When using colors derived from nouns, it isn't unusual for speakers to omit the word *color* (or *color de* or *de color*), so that a mustard-colored house would be *una casa mostaza*. When a noun is used in such a way, it is often still treated as a noun rather than an adjective, so it doesn't change form as adjectives typically do. (Some grammarians consider nouns used in this way to be invariable adjectives, that is, adjectives that don't change for number or gender). Thus "mustard-colored houses" would be *casas mostaza* rather than *casas mostazas* (although the latter is also used).

The more often a noun is used as a color, the more likely it is to be treated as a regular adjective, that is, one that changes in number with the noun being described. Often, different speakers won't always agree. Thus, the coffee-colored shirts may be described as *camisas café* or *camisas cafés*,

again depending on the speaker. More information on this phenomenon is available in a separate lesson on invariable adjectives.
