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French Phrases: Colours in French

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On this page, we look at some common French colour adjectives. On the following page, we look at some common colour modifiers (light, dark etc) and how to *combine* colours or form complex colour terms ("blue-green", "navy blue" etc).

Common colour adjectives in French

The folllowing are common French colour adjectives. Where there is a pronunciation difference between masculine and feminine forms, both are shown in that order. In the written form, these adjectives generally behave like other French adjectives: an **-e** is added in the feminine (where not already there) and/or an **-s** in the plural. Exceptions are flagged and discussed in the corresponding notes below.

beige	bɛʒ	beige
blanc, blanche	blɑ̃, blɑ̃ʃ	white
bleu	blø	blue
brun, brune	bʁæ̃, bʁyn	brown
châtain, châtaine	ʃatæ̃, ʃatɛn	brown, chestnut-brown (hair)
gris, grise	gʁi, gʁiz	grey
jaune	jon	yellow
marron[1]	maʁõ	brown
mauve	mov	mauve, light purple

noir	nwaʁ	black
orange[2]	oʁɑ̃ʒ	orange>
rose	ʁoz	pink
rouge	ʁuʒ	red
vert, verte	vɛʁ, vɛʁt	green
violet, violette	vjɔle, vjɔlɛt	violet, purple

Pronounce these words

Suggest a change / proposez une modification

Notes:
1. **marron** is identical in the feminine.
2. Prescriptively, **orange** is usually considered *invariable*. Since it already ends in **-e**, this just affects whether or not to add an **-s** in the plural, and prescriptive usage would thus dictate **des robes orange**. Actual usage is tending to write **oranges** (and to pluralise other "invariable" adjectives) in the plural. Note that this is purely a spelling issue: in pronunciation, this and most colours are invariable.

In French, colour adjectives almost always *follow* the noun that they describe. Thus:

une robe bleue	- a blue dress
une chemise marron	- a brown shirt
deux voitures vertes	- two green cars

Pronounce these words

Suggest a change / proposez une modification

Less common colours

The following words are also used to denote colour. In the majority of cases, they behave more like nouns than adjectives: they don't change in the feminine or plural[1].

abricot	abʁiko	apricot

argent	aʁʒɑ̃	silver
bronze	bʁõz	bronze
café	kafe	coffee-coloured
chamois	ʃamwa	buff
champagne	ʃɑ̃panj	champagne
châtaigne	ʃatɛng	chestnut
crème	kʁɛm	cream
écarlate	ekaʁlat	scarlet
indigo	æ̃digo	indigo (blue)
jade	ʒad	jade
lilas	lila	lilac
noisette	nwazɛt	hazel
olive	oliv	olive
or	ɔʁ	gold
paille	paj	straw-coloured
pourpre	puʁpʁ	crimson
safran	safʁɑ̃	saffron
saumon	somõ	salmon-pink
sépia	sepja	sepia
turquoise	tyʁkwaz	turquoise

Pronounce these words

Suggest a change / proposez une modification

Notes:
1. In prescriptive usage at least, it appears to be accepted (cf Thomas 1971:105; Price 2003:105) that specifically **écarlate** and **pourpre** are *not* invariable and so take **-s** in the plural. The reasoning behind this distinction is not entirely clear, since there is no possible pronunciation difference, and in writing there appears to be a general tendency towards pluralising "invariable" adjectives/nouns.

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