

Les adjectifs invariables Invariable Adjectives

French colours may be invariable adjectives

In French, adjectives normally have to agree with the nouns they modify in gender and number. However, there are numerous adjectives which don't agree - they have a single form that does not change to reflect the gender or number of the noun. These are called **invariable adjectives**.

Colour adjectives derived from nouns, such as **flowers**, **fruits**, and **gems**, are usually invariable:

| | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| amarante | amaranthine (dark purple-red) | lavande | lavender |
| argent | silver | lilas | lilac |
| aubergine | eggplant | marine | navy blue |
| auburn | auburn | marron | brown |
| carmin | carminc | noisette | hazel |
| cerise | cherry red | ocre | ochre |
| chair | flesh-coloured | or | gold |
| champagne | champagne | orange | orange |
| emeraude | emerald green | rubis | ruby red |
| grenat | garnet | turquoise | turquoise |
| indigo | indigo | vermillon | vermillion |
| kaki | khaki | | |

Exceptions:

1) **alezan** (*chestnut – used to describe the chestnut colour of horses*), **fauve** (*tawny/fawn*), **incarnat** (*rosy – between cherry red and pink*), **mauve**, **pourpre** (*crimson*), **rose** (*pink*), and **violet** are variable according to the normal rules of agreement.

2) **châtain** (*chestnut brown*) is semi-invariable - it usually agrees in number, but rarely in gender.

Multiple Colours

When **two or more** colours describe a noun, they **may or may not agree**:

- 1) If there are items of **each individual colour**, the adjectives **agree**.

| | |
|---|---|
| des drapeaux bleus, blancs, rouges | <i>red, white, and blue flags (some are red, some are white, and some are blue)</i> |
| des chemises rouges et blanches | <i>red and white shirts (some are red and some are black)</i> |
- 2) If each item has all of the colours, the adjectives are **invariable**.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| des drapeaux bleu, blanc, rouge | <i>red, white, and blue flags</i> |
| des chemises rouge et blanc | <i>red and white shirts</i> |

This is one instance where agreement is useful, because it gives you **more detail** than what is available in the English translation.

Compound Colors

When adjectives of colour are **modified** by another adjective or a noun, the adjectives are **invariable**:

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| une jupe gris clair | <i>light grey skirt</i> |
| des gants violet foncé | <i>dark purple gloves</i> |
| une couleur rouge- orange | <i>reddish-orange colour</i> |
| des yeux bleu- vert | <i>blue-green eyes</i> |
| une voiture vert pomme | <i>apple green car</i> |
| des fleurs rouge tomate | <i>tomato red flowers</i> |

Adapt. from: http://french.about.com/od/grammar/a/adjectives_inv.htm?hl=1