

Albright Art Supply

Watercolor Supply Guide for Beginners

Watercolor is a fine art media that can be intimidating for a beginner painter. To make your experience more enjoyable, it is best to have some basic supplies. The quality of paint and brushes will influence your results. It is recommended to purchase professional quality supplies if you can.

Paper

A watercolorist can use individual sheets, pads of paper or blocks. For the beginning artist, pads are cost-efficient. There are various weights and textures to watercolor paper. The three weights of paper are 90lb, 140lb and 300lb. The weight number is actually the weight of 500 20x30" sheets of paper. As the weight goes up, the less chance the paper will buckle when water is applied because it is thicker. Lighter papers such as 90lb and 140lb can be stretched onto a surface to avoid buckling. Stretching is a process of wetting the paper then adhering it to a board so it will stay flat when painting.

- 90lb paper is quite thin and more suited for studies and training; it will need to be stretched.
- 140lb is of medium thickness and the most used; it will also need to be stretched.
- 300lb is more like cardboard and doesn't require stretching but is more expensive and will take longer to dry.

The surface or grain of the paper will affect the results of your painting. Rough watercolor paper will add texture to your washes because the paint will settle in the little wells of the paper. Hot press paper, with its very slick surface, tends to make colors appear brighter and is great for detailed work. Cold press paper is somewhere between rough and hot press regarding paper texture. It is commonly used in many classes.

Paint

Watercolor paint comes in two forms: pan or tube. Pans are convenient and great for traveling. However, a painter may find it difficult to gather enough paint for a very large or dark wash. With tubes, the artist takes as much, or as little paint as needed on your palette.

Watercolor palette can be very subjective dependent upon the artist. Overall, it is suggested to start off with primary colors (Blue, Red and Yellow). By keeping your palette small, a beginner artist will learn to mix colors together resulting in more colors. Also, an artist could have a warm and a cool palette of the primary colors.

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As you get more proficient with the medium, an artist can learn more about Color Index Names. There are times color names are not consistent between brands of paint. The way to determine what paint is to check the code number on the paint tube. The Color Index Name is a universal system that assigns an alphanumeric code to each pigment in various art supplies (e.g., acrylics, oils and watercolors). For example, PB29 stands for Pigment Blue 29. It is commonly known as Ultramarine Blue.

Brushes

There are several brushes a watercolorist may use. Flats, rounds, riggers, and mops are examples of brushes an artist may use. Round brushes are commonly used in different sizes. They can create strokes in varying widths depending on the amount of pressure applied to the brush. If the round brush is very thin and long, it is known as a rigger. Flat brushes, which are wide and straight along the top of the bristles, are excellent for creating narrow or wide strokes. Mop brushes are another favorite of watercolor artists. They look like a powder brush from your makeup kit. They hold lots of water or fluid paint, making them perfect for washes.

Masking Fluid

Masking fluid or frisket is used to keep an area white in a painting especially those areas that are too small or complex to paint around. An old brush is best to use with masking fluid because an artist will want to keep better brushes for painting. A silicon colour blender tool is another option to use as it can be cleaned and easily reused for multiple projects.

Palette

Artist palettes come in many sizes and shapes. Typical palette shapes are flower shaped, a rectangle with well around the edges for paint or a butcher tray.

Classes:

Interested in instructional or online classes? Remember to check out Concord Art and The Umbrella Arts Center.

References for Extra Reading

Basic Watercolor Palette: 12 Essential Colors

<https://www.lydiamakepeace.com/blog/basic-watercolor-palette-12-essential-colors>

7 Watercolor Tips for Beginners

<https://www.strathmoreartist.com/blog-reader/id-7-watercolor-tips-for-beginners.html>

Videos

Albright Art Facebook Live Presentation: Betsy is going to fill you in on all the supplies & tools you need for watercolor painting <https://www.facebook.com/141264825912953/videos/1496508563721899>