

# Everything You Need to Know About Watercolour Supplies

Angela Fehr



## *Working with Watercolor Materials*

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I think most beginning painters are overwhelmed by the prospect of choosing the right brushes, paper and paint for painting in watercolour.

I believe it's best to keep your supplies as basic as possible in the early stages of learning to avoid being overwhelmed by choice, and even now my favorite watercolor supplies are one type of paper, two different brushes and about a dozen paint colors.

*Note: This document contains affiliate links. When you order using the links below, I receive a small commission. Thank you! Canada & international students can find resource links on the last page.*

## Brushes

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Most new artists choose brushes that are too small. When your brush is too small, you will struggle with your washes drying before you have completely filled them with color; it takes more strokes to fill the page, and your brush doesn't hold as much color.

I like a **large round brush with a fine point**. The large size (#10 or 12) holds lots of paint, while the point is capable of fine detail.

Natural hair brushes (sable or squirrel) are softer than synthetic and hold more paint and water, one reason they are preferred by professionals.



My favourite brush is the Escoda Versatil #10 rigger (third from top). It has a nice point for fine detail and holds lots of paint and water. You can fill a large area by using the side of the brush to deliver paint to the paper.

For beginners, I like the Neptune line made by Princeton. Start with a #10 or #12 round.

### Brush Links

- Escoda Versatil #10 long rigger, Series 1549:
  - [Blick](#) and [Amazon.com](#) (Canadians, I have never found a good deal on this brush on Amazon.ca). [Jackson's Art](#) often has good deals on this brush, however they are frequently sold out.
- Princeton Neptune Watercolor Brushes: [Blick](#) and [Amazon](#)

## Paint

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Choosing paint is a small part about brand, and a large part about colors. While I have over a hundred colors in my collection, I encourage new painters to start with no more than a dozen. You won't use what you don't know, and so working with a small range of colors gives you the opportunity to really get to know them with the goal of using them more confidently and mixing them more effectively.



I recommend you choose from the following colours.

A warm yellow: New Gamboge, Indian Yellow or Nickel Azo Yellow

A cool yellow: Hansa Yellow Light or Benzimidazolone Yellow

A warm blue: Ultramarine Blue or Cobalt Blue

A cool blue: Phthalo Blue or Phthalo Turquoise

A warm red: Perylene Red, Pyrrol Scarlet or Quinacridone Coral

A cool red: Quinacridone Magenta or Quinacridone Rose

Then add:

- A versatile brown such as Burnt Umber
- A darkest dark such as Payne's Grey or Indigo
- A leafy green
- A tomato red
- A purple/violet

If you'd like to start with a set of paints, [Daniel Smith's half pan sets](#) offer premium paint in a versatile range of colours.

Or you can buy several years' worth of paint by choosing tubes - I've listed my favorites on [Blick's site here](#).

**Shown here: [The Ultimate Mixing Half Pan Set from Daniel Smith Artist Materials](#)**



Please note that the cleanest, brightest colour mixes are made using the vibrant hues of magenta, cyan and yellow (think of the cool blue, cool yellow, and magenta inks in an inkjet printer), rather than the warmer red and blue that we usually associate with the primary colour wheel.

Fun colours to add later:

- Green Gold
- Dioxazine Violet
- Cobalt Teal
- Quinacridone Gold

**Recommended paint brands to use:**

**Economical paint** (some pigments are substituted for economy; look for the word "hue" in the description):

- Grumbacher
- Shinhan PWC
- American Journey
- Winsor & Newton Cotman

**Artist Quality Paint:**

- QoR
- Daniel Smith (my personal favorite)
- Holbein
- Sennelier
- Schmincke
- Da Vinci
- Winsor & Newton Professional

My preferred paints are listed here [at Amazon.com](#) and [Blick](#)

## Paper

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Most new painters struggle with the idea of paying for good watercolor paper. Almost every professional artist (I can't think of one who disagrees) will insist that **paper makes a difference!** More than anything else, your painting style will be dictated by what your paper is capable of.



**Student Grade Paper:** Not 100% cotton, usually has some wood pulp in the mix. Texture will often look regular, like a waffle or a woven fabric, and the surface will feel a bit slippery.

**Pros:** Affordable. Easy to find in art supply and craft stores.

**Cons:** Paint does not flow as readily. New layers of paint will lift/move the layers beneath. Masking fluid will often tear the paper when removed. Paper will pill more easily when trying to lift color and fix mistakes. Often single-sided (one side takes paint much better than the other).

**Artist-Quality Paper:** Look for 100% cotton, mould made paper. The surface should feel rough, hot press should have an absorbent consistency like peach skin. No obvious "waffle" weave in the appearance of the texture.

**Cons:** More expensive than student grade. Often not available outside of art supply stores.

**Pros:** More durable, holds up to masking fluid, scrubbing, lifting, layering. Fluid washes flow more beautifully. Colors appear more vibrant. Better balance between absorption and flow. Can usually paint equally well on both sides.

**You deserve to learn on good paper!** I watch for sales and buy full sheets of paper that I can tear down to the size I want. Usually these are a better value than blocks or pads.

### **Paper Types:**

- Hot press: smoothest paper, usually used for paintings requiring fine detail and less water. Some loose painters like the watermarks hot press encourages.
- Cold Press (in the UK known as NOT): textured paper, not as textured as rough. This is the most commonly used texture for watercolour painting.
- Rough: Like it sounds. Roughest textured paper.

### **Paper Thickness:**

Paper is graded by weight. 500 sheets of 140 lb paper weighs 140 lbs. I don't recommend buying weights lighter than 140 lb as they will buckle extensively when wet, making painting difficult.

- 140 lb (300 gsm) paper usually needs to be taped down to a support to help keep it flat while painting.
- 300 lb (600 gsm) is usually the heaviest paper you can buy, and feels like heavy card.

### **Paper Recommendations:**

Arches: [[Amazon](#) and [Blick](#)]

- Cold press 140 lb (300 gsm)
- Cold press 300 lb (600 gsm)
- [Cold press pads](#), 140 lb (I like the convenience of these but the texture is slightly different from the full sheets)

Hahnemühle: Cezanne, Turner, or Leonardo [[Amazon](#) and [Blick](#)]

Indigo Art Paper: [[Amazon](#) and [Blick](#)]

Handmade paper and more unpredictably textured. Enjoyable for loose, flowing washes.

Kilimanjaro from Cheap Joe's Art Stuff:

An economical, quality paper for US residents (shipping outside of the USA is high)

Saunders: (more common in the UK)

Bockingford

Winsor & Newton

Fabriano

*To stretch or not to stretch? If you're in discussion with watercolour artists, the topic of stretching paper is going to come up. Some artists insist that you must soak your watercolor paper, then staple it to a board and tape the edges with butcher's tape and allow to dry to a tight surface before painting. Others, like me, never stretch their paper. My personal opinion is that stretching was used in the past to rinse off some of the sizing of the paper and prepare the surface for painting, but that modern paper doesn't really need this treatment. Another artist says that stretching in advance is like the difference between an oil painter painting on a loose piece of canvas or a stretched one; that the tight surface is superior. You get to make up your own mind on this issue!*

[Check out my shopping page of more favourite art supplies on Amazon.com.](#)

### *Other Supplies:*

Palette: This [Reeves palette](#) was my favourite for many years. Fits in an extra-large ziploc bag for travel.

My current studio palette is a 64 deep-well, 18 inch diameter palette from [robax.com](#)



Support: I tape my paper to a [corrugated plastic board](#). They are light, easy to cut to size, and waterproof.

Travel Palette: The [Portable Painter](#) is beautifully designed and compact for travel. Fill with your favourite colours.

## *Books*

I'm always learning from watercolour mentors. Some of my favourite books that I often reference in my classes can be found listed here: <https://amzn.to/2FILwID>

## *Resources to Help You Learn*

While you can teach yourself to paint, sometimes the journey is just a little more efficient with a supportive instructor. **I believe that you can become your own favorite artist!** By developing skill in watercolor technique, you can feel free to paint expressively from your heart.

In [my online classes](#), you will:

- Learn essential watercolor techniques and **when to use them in your paintings**
- Develop your ability to **think like an artist**, learning design principles so you can create strong and dynamic paintings
- Grow your knowledge of color theory, value, composition, and how to use these and other foundations of art in your paintings
- Learn how to **simplify** your paintings and learn more efficiently
- Become more **playful** in your painting process, while still growing your skills
- Learn how to draw with your brush and handle your brush more confidently
- Understand common creative blocks and learn how to **overcome discouragement** and fear in your artistic practice.
- Develop your personal style and create paintings that you absolutely love.

I started teaching watercolor because I just couldn't keep the exciting things I was learning about the medium to myself. I really believe that watercolor is the most beautiful medium for painting, and that everyone who wants to paint in watercolor CAN. You have what it takes to make paintings that thrill you and come straight from your heart, and I love sharing what I've learned over the years that makes me my own favorite artist. Join me at [learn.angelafehr.com](http://learn.angelafehr.com) today!

*Best wishes for many wonderful watercolor adventures!*





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## *Shopping Internationally?*

*Below find some links to suppliers in Canada, Europe & Australia*

*The links below are not exhaustive. If you have a supplier you'd love to recommend, [email me!](#)*

### *Canada:*

[Delta Art](#), Edmonton, Alberta

[Opus Art Supplies](#), British Columbia

[Curry's Art Supplies](#), Ontario

### *Europe:*

[Jackson's Art Supplies](#)

[Ken Bromley Art Supplies](#)

### *Australia:*

[Wide Bay Gallery/Art Supplies](#)