



WATERCOLOR SUPPLIES GUIDE

By Amy Weller Art

GETTING STARTED

It's no surprise that watercolor is a popular medium amongst artists, including beginners. Watercolor is a loose, expressive, vibrant, and emotive medium, and you can get stunning painting results - if you use the right materials.

This may surprise you, but when I first started using watercolors, I hated them. I was frustrated with the results I was getting and threw away many paintings I did because I was unhappy with how my paintings turned out. At one point, I even considered getting rid of my watercolor set.

It was only when I started watching tutorials on YouTube and learning more about watercolors that I realised where I was going wrong – most of my issues were a result of using the wrong materials.

I've said this many times with art supplies – the internet is flooded with so many different brands that it is hard to distinguish what materials are worth buying, and which ones you should avoid.

I truly believe that when it comes to using watercolor, using the correct supplies is essential in achieving the results you want.

My main aim in this guide is to help beginners choose the right watercolor supplies so that they can get the most out of their paintings, and don't make the same mistakes as I did.

So, let's talk through all the supplies you need, and my top supply recommendations!





WATERCOLOR PAINTS

WHICH PAINTS SHOULD I CHOOSE?

This may be a question you have asked yourself already as there are so many options to choose from, and it can be hard to find the right paints for you. But that's why I'm here to help! Let's take a look at some of the options available to you & what is the best fit for you.

Watercolor paints:

- 1. Watercolor pans:** Watercolor pans are blocks of pigment and binder that become activated once water is applied to them. They are a great option to use as they are compact, easily stored, and easy to travel with. You only use what you need so that means there is little wastage with these paints & they will last a very long time. Most paint pans also come with their very own paint palette, so they are an all in one paint set! A downside to paint pans, however, is that colors can become muddy when moving from color to color if you don't wash your brushes in between. The paints can also dry quicker than paint tubes meaning you need to keep activating the colors when in use.
- 2. Watercolor tubes:** Watercolor tubes are perfect for large scale paintings. This is because the paint is a lot thicker than paint pan watercolors so will take less time to dry out. Colors in paint tubes are also often more concentrated than paint pan watercolors, meaning that colors are often a lot brighter and more vibrant. The biggest issue with using watercolor tubes is that you often get a lot of wastage from them so you need to be careful with the amount that you use.

CHEAP OR EXPENSIVE?

There is a common misconception that cheap quality watercolor paints are bad quality, and that in order to get the best quality paints you need to pay a lot of money. This isn't true. There are plenty of excellent quality watercolor paint sets available on the market that are also affordable and great for beginners! Some of my personal favourite watercolor paint brands are:

- **Winsor and Newton watercolors.**
- **Van Gogh watercolors.**
- **Arteza watercolor sets.**

Of course, these aren't the only options available for artists, there's plenty more great brands!





WATERCOLOR BRUSHES

Trying to find the right watercolor brushes was one of the hardest things for me when I first started using watercolors. There were hundreds of different brands, sets, and sizes, and I found the whole process overwhelming and didn't know what brushes I should invest in. Let's take a look at some things you should consider when looking at buying your brushes:

1. **Type of paintbrush:** Using the correct type of paintbrush is essential for creating certain techniques and effects with watercolor. By using the wrong type of brush, it will be very hard for you to achieve the results you want in your paintings.

Firstly, make sure you are using watercolor brushes and not brushes designed for oil or acrylic painting. Watercolor brushes are a lot softer and more flexible than most oil/ acrylic paintbrushes. Secondly, decide whether you want to use animal hair brushes or synthetic brushes. As a beginner, animal hair brushes may be out of the question for you as they are extremely expensive, but you can find great quality synthetic brushes (cruelty free) on the market that are affordable and suit a lower budget!

2. **Shape & size of paintbrush:** Watercolor paintbrushes come in a variety of different shapes and sizes, so don't limit yourself to just purchasing one brush – especially if you want to experiment with lots of different effects!

I'd recommend a minimum of 3 brushes, although if you can afford to buy more then spending a bit of extra money on a full set of brushes will give you a fantastic range of sizes and styles of brushes. If you can only afford a few brushes, I'd recommend buying a small, medium, and large sized brush, so that you can get fine details as well as cover large areas of a painting. If you can afford a whole set of brushes, I'd recommend buying a set that includes: a precision brush for details, small sized brush, medium sized brush, large sized brush, rounded paintbrush, flat paintbrush, and fan paintbrush, as this will give you variety and allow you to create lots of stunning watercolor effects!

MY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are hundreds of fantastic paintbrushes out there and many reputable brands, so the paintbrushes you decide to buy is up to you and down to personal preference. With that being said, I've listed a few personal recommendations below based on paintbrushes I own & love – these brushes are perfect for beginners as they are easy to use & affordable!

- **Daler Rowney/ rounded brushes & aquafine brushes.**
- **Winsor & Newton paintbrushes.**
- **Escoda paintbrushes.**
- **Princeton paintbrushes.**



A close-up photograph of several watercolor paper brands, including 'WATERCO', 'GR...', 'COLD P...', 'ARCH...', 'CH...', 'RCOLOU', and 'TINE', arranged diagonally across the top of the page.

WATERCOLOR PAPER

The paper you use to work on is just as important as the paints & brushes. Using paper that is not suitable for watercolor work can ruin your paintings, so it is essential that you use paper that is designed for watercolor paintings.

Watercolor paper is absorbent and thick which means it can take many layers of paint and water without much warping and damage to the paper surface. Make sure you are painting on paper that is a minimum of 140lb in weight – anything less than this is not absorbent enough for large amounts of water and may buckle.

There are many great brands and variations of watercolor paper available, but there are 3 main types of paper: hot pressed, cold pressed, and rough.

1. **Hot pressed paper:** Hot pressed paper is a smooth surface watercolor paper that has been rolled through hot cylinders during the manufacturing process. This paper is most used by artists that love to paint portraits as you get soft and smooth painting results.
2. **Cold pressed paper:** Cold pressed paper is a slightly rougher textured paper than hot pressed paper as it is rolled through hot cylinders during the manufacturing process. This paper is popular amongst artists that love to paint a lot of textured pieces and like a little more tooth to their paper.
3. **Rough paper:** Rough textured paper is not rolled through either cold or hot cylinders during the manufacturing process, so the result is a much rougher textured paper and a heavy tooth of pattern to the paper.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS

Like with watercolor paints and brushes, it really is down to personal preference what paper you buy. The most important thing to remember is using paper that is designed specifically for watercolors and that the paper weight is suitable for many applications of water.

Some of my personal recommendations are:

- **Arches hot pressed watercolor paper (140lb)**
- **Arches cold pressed watercolor paper (140lb)**
- **Fabriano Artístico hot pressed watercolor paper (140lb)**
- **Fabriano cold pressed watercolor paper (140lb)**
- **Daler Rowney aquafine texture watercolor paper (140lb)**
- **Winsor & Newton hot pressed watercolor paper (140lb)**
- **Winsor & Newton cold pressed watercolor paper (140lb)**





OTHER SUPPLIES

WHAT OTHER SUPPLIES DO YOU NEED?

You may not need or use all of the following supplies in your paintings, but I've included them in this guide in case you want to experiment with different supplies combined with your watercolors. You may not realise this, but you can create many unique effects by combining your watercolor paints with some of the supplies below!

Let's first run through a quick list of some of the other supplies you may need & may use with watercolors, and I'll explain in more detail what these supplies can be used for on the next few pages:

- **Watercolor pencils** – for sketch outlines & water-soluble drawings.
- **Pencil sharpener** – to sharpen your watercolor pencils.
- **Pencil eraser** – to erase any harsh outlines.
- **Graphite pencil** – for sketch outlines (keep outlines light so pencil lines don't show through paintings, or alternatively use a watercolor pencil for outlines).
- **Water pen** – for picking up colors & also creating cool drop effects with water.
- **Brush pens** – for use with water to create stunning paintings.
- **Masking fluid** – to block certain areas from watercolor. Simply peel off once dried. (Use old brush to apply).
- **Gouache paint** – slightly thicker than watercolor but great in combination with them.
- **Masking tape/ tape** – such as washi tape, scotch tape, or masking tape to tape down your work and prevent buckling.
- **Fine liners** – for more illustrative watercolor pieces & creating line art.
- **White gel pen/ gel pens** – archival with watercolor and great for creating highlights.
- **Colored pencils** – great to enhance areas of a painting once dried.
- **Spray bottle** – helps to keep pan paints moist & also good for effects.
- **2 jars of water** – keeps brushes cleaner for longer.
- **Paper towels** – to help absorb water if too much is applied.
- **Sponges** – helps to erase mistakes but also great for textures!

You can also create cool features by using the following items that may be lying around your house: salt, cotton buds, cling film, rice, foil, and more! The possibilities to create stunning watercolor effects is endless!





WATERCOLOR PENCILS

Watercolor pencils are fantastic to have on your watercolor supply list as you can use them for sketching outlines and also for painting with. They can be applied either through drawing and then activating with water, or by applying water directly to the pencil tip and then laying colors with. They are a much less messy way of painting too!

PENCIL SHARPENER & PENCIL ERASER:

If you are using watercolor pencils, it's essential that you have a pencil sharpener on hand so you can frequently sharpen your pencils! You will also need a pencil eraser to fix outline mistakes and lighten up your sketch if the outlines are too dark.

GRAPHITE PENCIL:

A graphite pencil may come in handy for creating sketch outlines before you start painting. Just be careful not to make your sketches too heavy as the pencil lines can show through your painting and muddy colors.

WATER PENS & WATER BRUSHES

Water pens and water brushes are great to use if you want to have a less messy way of painting! That is because all the watercolor paint is contained within the brushes and only activated with water. Water pens allow you to pick whatever color you like from your palette and directly apply to your paper. They are also great for creating drop/ drip effects!

MASKING FLUID

Masking fluid is a great way to block off certain parts of a piece that you do not want to paint. It creates a barrier against water meaning when you peel it off your paper stays untouched underneath. Make sure your room is well ventilated and use a cheap or old paintbrush to apply to your paper as it can ruin brushes.

GOUACHE PAINT

Gouache paint is very similar to water as it uses the same binder but uses more pigment meaning it is opaquer than watercolor. Gouache paint is a great medium to use in combination with watercolor as it enhances colors and blends well with watercolor.

MASKING TAPE

Masking tape, washi tape, or scotch tape are great tapes to use for taping down your watercolor paper to a surface or drawing block. Taping down your work is essential to prevent the paper from warping.





FINE LINERS

Fine liners are great to use to create more illustrative style paintings! They can be used for creating outlines and also for creating line art in combination with watercolors.

GEL PENS

Gel pens are an easy way to create highlights and finishing touches to watercolor paintings. I love using a white gel pen to add extra details & highlights into my pieces at the end of my process.

COLORED PENCILS

Colored pencils are great to use once your paintings have dried, as you can enhance colors with them and make your paintings more vibrant!

SPRAY BOTTLE

A spray bottle comes in handy for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it's a great little tool to use to wet down your paint pan, and it'll keep your pan wet for a long time meaning you don't have to keep adding water. The second reason why a spray bottle is great to use is because it can create a stunning mist effect in your paintings.

2 JARS OF WATER

A game changer for me when painting in watercolors is using two jars of water! When you just use one jar of water, it doesn't take long before the water becomes muddy, and this can cause your washes to be discolored and your brushes to get dirty quickly. Instead of just using one jar, try using two! First, rinse off your brush in the first jar of water, and then give it an extra clean in the second jar of water. This will keep your brushes cleaner for longer and makes sure your paints don't get too muddied.

PAPER TOWELS

Paper towels come in handy when you have applied too much water to your paintbrush or paper. If you apply too much water, you can get pools of water that accumulate on your paper. A paper towel is great to use to dab off excess water from your paintbrush, and also excess water from your paper. Another great thing about paper towels is they are excellent for creating textures!

SPONGES

Different types of sponges come in use for creating very textured watercolor pieces. For example, if you are creating a lot of background sceneries such as trees & foliage, sponges are a quick and easy way to paint them realistically!





