

Painting Supplies for BEGINNERS



Choosing the right painting surfaces, brushes, soap, palette knives, palettes, and paints

This resource has four sections:

- Painting Surfaces
- Brushes for Artists
- Palette Knives and Palettes
- Selecting Paint Colors

Painting Surfaces

You need both a surface to apply paint to (such as a canvas board) and a sloped surface to place your painting on as you work (such as a desk or easel).

Canvas Boards

Large canvas boards can be intimidating for beginners. Instead, buy a few small canvas boards (Figures 1 and 2). Ideal sizes for learning fundamental painting techniques include:

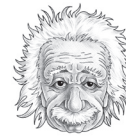
- 8 by 10 in (20.3 by 25.4 cm)
- 9 by 12 in (22.9 by 30.5 cm)
- 12 by 16 in (30.5 by 40.6 cm)



Tip!

Learning to paint doesn't need to be expensive.

Discount stores and dollar stores usually carry inexpensive painting supplies, including canvas boards, brushes, and acrylic paint.



ArtSpeak

Acrylic paints: Water-based, fast-drying artists' paints that become water-resistant when dry.

Canvas board: An inexpensive, rigid board with a canvas-textured surface that is ideal for painting.

Brushes: (also called *paintbrushes*) Painting tools used to apply a wet medium to a surface (such as a canvas board).

Figure 1

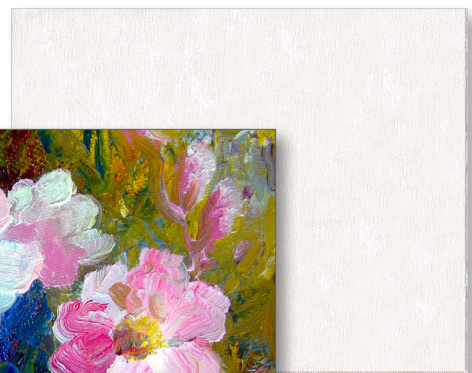


Figure 2



If you decide to draw your subject on a canvas board before adding paint (Figure 3), you also need drawing supplies and a can of spray fixative (Figure 4).

Fixative prevents the graphite in pencils from bleeding through and ruining your completed painting.

When the fixative is completely dry, use a large brush to apply one or two thin coats of thin white paint or Gesso (Figure 5) to the canvas to lighten the pencil marks.



Caution!

Don't use painting surfaces that absorb paint and/or wrinkle (such as paper).

Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Tip!

Be sure to choose a fixative that is specifically designed for graphite pencils. Many arts and crafts stores carry several types of spray fixative that are formulated for a variety of different mediums.



Tip!

Gesso and white paint serve as erasers for artists who paint.

Simply paint over any mistakes or sections you don't like, wait for the paint to dry, and then paint over that section again.



Figure 6

Sloped Surfaces

Any surface you choose to place a painting on while you paint needs to be sloped (Figure 6).

An easel (Figure 7) works beautifully for creating large paintings, but is not the best option for beginners who are practicing techniques with fine brushes.

A flat board propped up on a table (Figure 8) or a drafting desk with a slanted surface (Figure 9) allows you to rest your arm on its surface to better control your paintbrush.

Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 7



Brushes for Artists

When you take a trip to any major art store, expect to be totally mesmerized and overwhelmed by all the different types of brushes (Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 10



You may see hundreds of shapes, brands, colors, and sizes. Thankfully, all paintbrushes have only three fundamental parts – each of which can help you determine if a brush is suitable for you:

1. **Hairs** (sometimes called *bristles*) are on the end of a paintbrush and are the means by which you apply paint to your painting surface (Figure 12).
2. **Ferrule**: is a cylinder (usually made of metal) that holds the brush hairs (or bristles) in their proper place, and joins them to the handle (Figure 13).
3. **Handle**: is the part of a paintbrush held by the artist, and comes in different lengths (Figure 14).

Before you buy brushes, inspect them carefully to ensure that their:

- hairs don't come out when gently pulled.
- ferrules have no seams.
- handles are securely attached.

Brushes with any of these problems usually don't last for more than a few minutes. Also, they tend to shed, and their handles frequently break away from the ferrule.

Figure 14

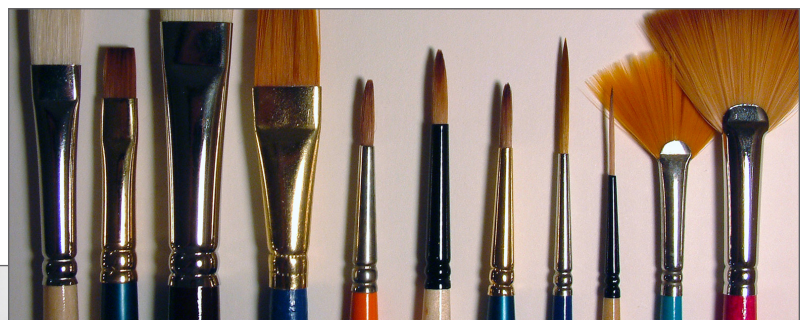


Figure 11

Figure 12



Figure 13

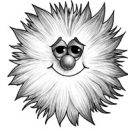


You don't need to spend a lot of money on brushes when you're learning how to paint.

After all, the first challenge for beginners is to simply learn and practice painting techniques.

Figure 15

A large, soft brush (Figure 15) is perfect when you want to apply a thin layer of white or colored paint to the entire surface of a canvas.



As an Aside

The brushes in Figure 16 were a serendipitous discovery in a local dollar store. A package of 6 brushes cost only \$1.00!

Surprisingly, they're almost as good as student quality brushes that cost much more (so, I bought 15 packages).

Figure 16



A beginner's selection of brushes should also include:

- filbert brushes (marked 1 in Figure 17) are ideal for painting large sections that don't require clean edges.
- medium size flat brushes (marked 2).
- medium size round brushes (marked 3).
- script liner brushes (marked 4), the workhorse for creating clean edges, signing your name, and painting many types of fine details and textures.



Caution!

If you leave a brush loaded with acrylic paint out of water for only three to five minutes, chances are it's ruined.

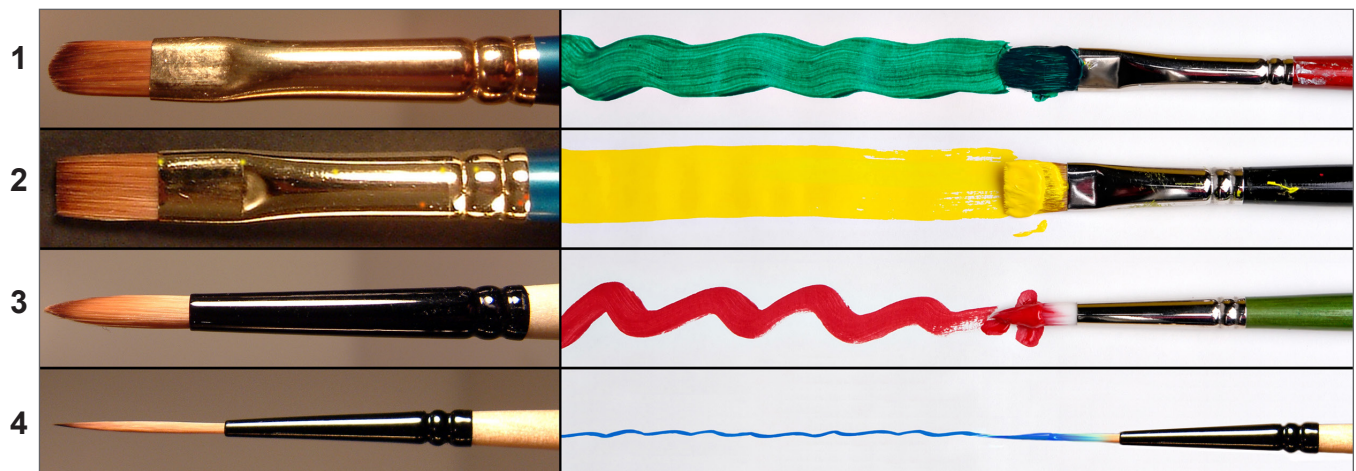


Tip!

Use non-oily soap to wash your brushes. Oil and acrylics don't mix, just as oil and water don't mix.

The size and shape of each of these four types of paintbrushes plays a big role in determining how your finished paintings look. Each makes unique marks and is therefore suited for specific applications.

Figure 17



You can choose brushes with either short or long handles:

- **Short handled brushes** work best for artists who like to work close to their painting on small to medium canvases and/or prefer detailed subjects. A short handle is unlikely to hit you in the face as you paint.
- **Long handled brushes** are great for artists who prefer to work on medium to large canvases an arms-length away from their canvases.

A long handle allows you to be farther away from the canvas and therefore becomes an extension of your arm.

Palette Knives and Palettes

Palette knives come in many different types and shapes (plastic ones are simply awful).

The working end of an ideal palette knife is an elongated diamond shape made of metal (Figure 18). Its handle is usually made of wood.

A palette can be any non-porous, flat surface (such as Plexiglas or thin finished wood). Another option is a disposable palette with tear-off sheets (Figure 19).

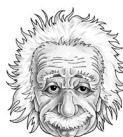
Figure 19



Tip!

You may get frustrated when painting with small brushes.

Bigger brushes encourage you to focus on the entire canvas, rather than tiny, intricate details that may be unrealistically difficult – especially if you're a beginner.



ArtSpeak

Palette: A flat surface made of paper, plastic, wood, metal, or glass used for holding, mixing, and/or storing paint.

Palette knife: (also called a *painting knife* or *mixing knife*) A trowel-shaped, flexible knife used for painting and/or mixing paint.

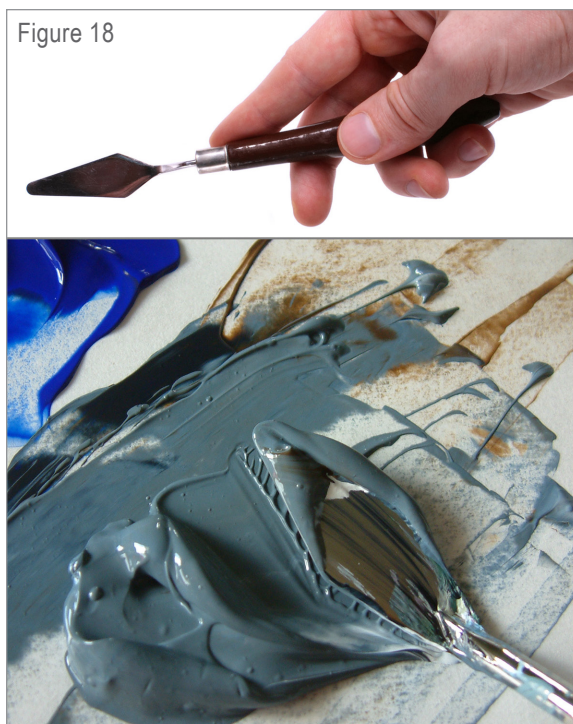


Caution!

Don't take on a painting subject that is beyond your current skill level.

Expect to feel overwhelmed if you try to paint complex subjects before you have mastered basic techniques.

Figure 18



Acrylic paints have to be mixed quickly on a palette and then added to a wet palette before the paint dries.

A wet palette is a plastic container with a cover that is designed to store your mixed paint colors and keep the paint from drying too quickly.

You can save enough money in paint after only a few paintings to more than pay for this investment. When the cover is snugly sitting on a palette, the paints usually stay wet for several days.

You may not find a wet palette exactly like the one shown in Figure 20, but most stores that sell acrylics carry wet palettes.

In addition to a wet palette, remember to pick up a couple of extra packages of the special papers that are specifically designed to fit inside.

Figure 20

**Tip!**

Essential supplies for all acrylic painters also include:

- **Two tall glasses or plastic containers:** one filled with water to dip brushes in as you paint and the other to store clean brushes with the handles down to prevent the hairs/bristles from bending (and being ruined).
- **Paper towels or soft rags:** needed while you paint to clean paint off the brush when you switch to a different paint color and again before you wash your brushes.
- **Old clothing:** to wear instead of or over top of other clothing. Acrylic paints can stain fabrics, so make sure you always wear old clothing when you paint.

**Tip!**

If you plan to take an extended break from painting, place your wet palette on a flat surface in your freezer.

When you are ready to paint again, remove the palette and give the paint an hour to thaw before you resume painting.

Then, mix each color thoroughly to get rid of the textured remnants of ice crystals.

**Caution!**

When you purchase a wet palette, take time to read its instructions!

Some types of wet palettes require you to spray the mixed paint colors with water whenever the cover is left off for more than a few minutes.

Any spray bottle can work but be careful not to add too much water. Your individual mounds of acrylic paint can easily become a runny mess of watery colors.

Other types of wet palettes include a thin sponge that sits under a sheet of paper. As long as the sponge stays wet, so too does the paper and the paint.

Selecting Paint Colors

The only tubes of paint you need to buy are primary colors (two different hues of yellow, blue, and red), raw umber, and white.

The following eight basic colors (Figure 21) can be mixed together to create any color you can see or imagine:

1. White
2. Alizarin Crimson
3. Cadmium Red
4. Ultramarine Blue
5. Cerulean Blue
6. Yellow Ochre
7. Cadmium Yellow
8. Raw Umber

Figure 21

**Tip!**

When mixing colors for a painting, you use more white paint than any other “color”, so remember to buy a big tube.

**Caution!**

Make sure the paints you plan to purchase are actually acrylic - not oils, watercolor, or tempera. Take time to carefully read the text on each tube! Tubes of acrylic paint and oil paint look almost identical.

**Tip!**

As your painting skills advance, you may want to invest in stretched canvases (canvas that is mounted on a wooden frame). Acid in a canvas board may eventually begin disintegrating its surface and damage your painting.

**Tip!**

Beginners to painting can use small bottles of acrylic craft paints (Figure 22) instead of the more expensive tubes of acrylic paints. However, one of the drawbacks of craft paints is that they are diluted with water and might require more than one coat of paint to cover the canvas.

Figure 22

