



Descal Arts

Artist tips and techniques for watercolorists, acrylic painters and decorative artists from Dawn Evans Scaltreto

Watercolor Special Issue

WatercolorSupplies: What to buy to Start Out

You are at the art store and you see lots of brushes, lots of paints, lots of different papers—OH NO! You might feel like Dorothy in the land of Oz. Or worse, you might buy all the wrong materials and find out too late that you can't use what you have spent money on. This guide will help clarify what you need to start painting with watercolors.

THE PAINTS

There are two different types of watercolor paints, tube paints and pan paints. There is really not much of a difference, except with tube paints you will need to buy a palette to put your colors in. Once you have squeezed out some color into one of the wells in your palette, you can let the colors dry out between painting sessions and they may be re-wetted just like pan type colors. You should get the best paints you can afford—the better the paint the better the colors

will flow together and work for you. You can buy a pre-selected set of colors, or choose the ones that you like. The best colors to start with are listed in the column at right.

THE PAPER

The paper is the second most important thing. Cheap watercolor paper doesn't work well with water or colors, and you will end up with a poor picture that is difficult to fix. The best paper is 100% rag paper—that means it is made out of all cotton. It is very expensive and you don't need it to start out. Several manufacturers make good student grade watercolor paper. Strathmore 400 series 140 lb. cold press paper is excellent. The 140 lb. refers to how thick the paper is (the higher the weight, the heavier the paper), and "cold press" refers to the surface texture. There are three grades of texture. "Hot press" is very smooth like it was ironed,

"cold press" is a little bumpy and makes nice watercolor paintings, and "rough" is very rough.

OTHER SUPPLIES

To start out you will also need a plastic palette with wells to hold your colors separate that also has a mixing area for blending colors if you are not using pan type colors.

There are special brushes made for watercolors. A good watercolor brush holds a lot of water and color. Robert Simmons makes good brushes, but there are many inexpensive brushes to start out. Get at least a #10 round brush to begin.

You will need a pencil and eraser. A regular school pencil is fine to start with, and I prefer white plastic erasers for mistakes.

Masking tape is useful for taping out edges of your painting. Paper towels are necessary to blot your brush and mop up spills.

CHECKLIST

Basic Paints

Alizarin Crimson
Cadmium Red Med.
Gamboge OR Cadmium Yellow Med.
Lemon Yellow
Hooker's Green Dk.
Ultramarine Blue
Pthalo Blue
Burnt Sienna
Burnt Umber
Raw Sienna (recommended brand Grumbacher Academy or Winsor & Newton/Cotman)

140 lb. Cold Pressed Watercolor Paper (recommended brand Strathmore 400 Series)

Plastic palette with wells and mixing area

Round watercolor brush, at least #10 (recommended brand Robert Simmons SN-89 #18)

Pencil and eraser

Masking tape

Paper towels