

BASIC MATERIALS FOR WATERCOLOR PAINTING



The really good news is that it doesn't take a lot in the way of supplies and materials to be able to paint successfully in watercolor.

Watercolor is a tricky medium. Using inferior materials – especially paint, paper and brushes will make it even trickier. So, do yourself a big favor and purchase **professional grade paint, Arches 140lb Cold Press paper, and the best synthetic (nylon) brushes** you can afford. Skimp, if you must, on everything else – palette, sketchbooks, pencils, rags, water containers, and backing boards.



Paint

Keep It Simple!. Especially if you are just starting out. Working with a limited number of colors from the start will help you develop a sensitive eye for color and lead to exceptional color mixing skills.

The best advice I can give about paint is to start with professional grade paint. The way it works and the way it looks will make the cost worth it. When you are just starting out, it is tempting to pick up a pre-packaged, low-cost set of colors. Resist that temptaion. You will not get the best from this tricky medium or really be able to learn it well using inferior paint.



GIGN Codes

One important, but often overlooked piece of info about the watercolor paint you are purchasing is the *Color Index Generic Name* or CIGN. Each pigment can be universally identified by its CIGN.

Every manufacturer names the colors they sell. These names are **descriptive** but they are not necessarily **comparative**.

The exact composition of a color with the same name can vary from one manufacturer to another. For instance, there are at least six different formulations of professional grade Permanent Alizarin Crimson among different manufacturers. They all look different and work differently with other colors. Knowing the actual pigment components by their CIGN codes will you avoid unpleasant surprises.

The list of suggested basic colors, below, includes the CIGN code for the pigment(s) used to create that particular color.

Suggested Basic Color Palette

The list includes mostly versions of the *primary* colors – red, yellow and blue. A palette that consists of only these basics is extremely versatile and will help you develop your ability to both see and accurately mix practically any color you need.



A recommended list of colors can vary greatly from one artist to another. My own palette consists mostly of a variety of primary colors. Though seemingly limited, it provides me a tremendous variety of colors for my paintings. I recommend a similar set of primaries for everyone, especially beginners.

Below, you'll find a list of twelve basic colors. Essentially, this is a palette full of primary colors – reds, yellows and blues and a couple useful neutrals. This set of eight colors will serve you very well as you learn and gain experience. There are a cool and warm version of each primary color. It is possible to mix an extremely wide range of color using only this set.

	Brand / Brand Color Name	CIGN Pigment Code
Cool Red	Winsor Newton / Permanent Alizarin Crimson	PR206
Warm Red	DaVinci Cadmium Red Light or Winsor Newton Cadmium Red	PR108
Low Intensity Cool Red	Daniel Smith Quinacridone Burnt Scarlet	PR
Cool Yellow	DaVinci / Aureolin	PY40/PY3
Low Intensity Cool Yellow	Daniel Smith Quinacridone Deep Gold	PO48 / PY150
Warm Yellow	DaVinci / Cadmium Yellow Medium	PY35
Cool Blue	DaVinci or Winsor Newton or Daniel Smith/ Cobalt Blue	PB28
Light Cool Blue	Winsor Newton Cerulean Blue	PB35
Dark Cool Blue	Any Professional Grade Pthalo Blue	
Warm Blue	Winsor Newton / French Ultramarine Blue	PB29
Light Neutral	Da Vinci / Raw Sienna	PBr7
Dark Neutral	Da Vinci / Burnt Sienna	PBr7

Palette

Any large – at least 10” x 12”- sturdy, deep welled, white plastic palette with a cover will do. There are many manufacturers that produce good, low-cost plastic palettes that will perform well for many years.

One of the recommended palettes is the *John Pike* palette, shown at right. It is made of a sturdier plastic than most, has large wells you can fill with paint, and has a large central mixing area.



Brushes



A handful quality synthetic or synthetic/natural blend brushes are really all that are needed to do the trick. The most important characteristics in watercolor brushes are water absorption, springiness and, for rounds, coming to a fine point at the tip.

Brushes can be made of either synthetic material – usually nylon – as well as natural hair. In general, the natural hair brushes will be the most expensive. While it is nice to have those beautiful natural hair brushes, you can get along with a set of quality nylon brushes.

The bristles of nylon brushes can be either white or a golden brown color and are good choices to start with, as they generally combine the best characteristics of natural hair brushes at moderate cost.

The most commonly used brushes for watercolor painting are rounds and flats. Rounds are brushes that are round at the ferrule (the metal piece that holds the bristles) and are constructed so that they come to a point. There are many good quality brushes on the market. Purchase the best you can afford. Stay away from the low-cost, pre-packaged sets – they are usually inferior.

I recommend starting with three rounds, two flats and a rigger. The table below provides a guide to the sizes you'll need. Stick with brushes from these brands, at least at the start: **Escoda, Isabey, Loew-Cornell, Princeton, Raphael, Richeson, Robert Simmons, Royal-Langnickel, Winsor-Newton.**

Brush	Width At Ferrule	Typical Brush #
Large Round	½" / 12 or 13mm	Can vary widely 18 to 38
Medium Round	¼" / 6 or 7mm	14
Small Round	1/8" / 3 or 4mm	6 or 8
Medium Flat	1" / or 25mm or 2.5cm	
Small Flat	¼" / 6 or 7mm	
Rigger	get a #3 or #4 – don't worry about exact width	



Paper

Watercolor paper is the one area to NOT try and save money!

The one paper I recommend for everyone when they are starting out or still learning to get a handle on watercolor is **Arches 140lb Cold Press paper**. It is moderately absorbent and will help you manage those fluid washes you should be using to get the best from watercolor. It is great to start on, and will continue to be great for those accomplished works you will create as you progress! Many accomplished watercolor artists use it for most of their work.



The best way to minimize the cost is to buy paper by the full sheets (22" x 30") and cut or tear them to a workable size – 11" x 15" (quarter sheet) or smaller. It is also available in pad and block form. Neither of these is the most cost effective.

Mounting Board



Watercolor paper needs to be supported while painting. I recommend using a product known as "**Gatorboard**". It is thicker version of foamcore board made from plastic materials to prevent warping. It is light, sturdy and durable. Paper can be taped, clamped or stretched to Gatorboard.

If you have a piece of scrap masonite, plywood or luan laying around, you can use that. Just remember that any wooden board needs to be sealed with several coats of varnish before using them as paper supports, or else they will warp.



Other Related Materials

Besides paint, palette, paper and brushes, there are a number of other supplies that will come in handy.



A sketchbook or two – one for pencil drawings and sketches, and perhaps, another one for color sketches. These should be at least 9” x 12”. The pencil sketchbook will be useful for drawing and sketching potential subjects along with working out compositions for painting. Almost any sketchbook with plain white paper will do. Hardbound sketchbooks are usually the most expensive.

For color sketches, there are lots of choices. Make sure it has at least 90lb paper that is meant for watercolor or watermedia. The **Bee Paper Aquabee** sketchbook is good choice – high quality and reasonably priced.

For pencils, you can go with the common #2s that are everywhere. But I recommend using **2B drawing pencils**. They are a bit softer than the common #2 and are less likely leave scoring marks on the soft surface of watercolor paper. Also, they are versatile drawing instruments equally able to make light and dark marks, as well as everything in between. You’ll want an eraser. Kneaded erasers – usually gray rectangles - are versatile and will work for both erasing lines on watercolor paper as well as being a valuable tool for drawing.

You’ll also need some rags for blotting and cleanup. Paper towels are popular and absorbent but old T-shirts, sheets or bath towels cut into rectangles is the more environmental friendly way to go! I recommend using two water containers – one for clean water and one for dirty rinse water. Again, you can purchase water containers, but it’s easier on the environment if you re-purpose used plastic containers.

On the next page you’ll find a checklist to use as a guide for purchasing materials and supplies.



Watercolor Supplies and Materials Checklist

Any well stocked art supply store should have all of these in stock. Prices are better if you shop online, especially if you are stocking up for the first time. Online art supply dealers include – dickblick.com, cheapjoes.com, artsupplywarehouse.com, jerrysartarama.com

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Paper - REALLY! Only get Arches 140lb Cold Press Paper to start. Full sheets – “22 x 30” are the lowest cost way to buy paper. Blocks are the most expensive.

Other Materials- Pencil Sketchbook, perhaps an **Bee Paper Aquabee** watercolor sketchbook, a few **2B drawing pencils** to start, a **kneaded eraser**, mounting boards, bulldog clips, water containers, rags.





Tony Conner's path as a self-taught artist has followed a serious and active course that has been dedicated to a single medium – watercolor – and an apprenticeship to its unique disciplines.

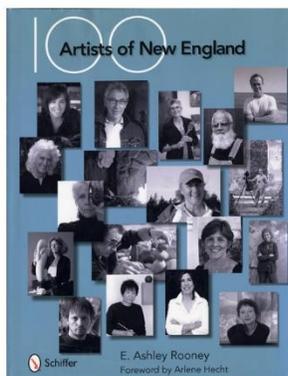
While primarily expressing and interpreting the landscape and seascape, his paintings reflect an interest in a variety of subjects.

He prefers working from direct observation. Whether it is a landscape, seascape, still life or figure model, he is attracted to a particular scene or viewpoint based on the pattern of individual objects, contrasts of color, value, or intensity and, most of all, the quality of light.

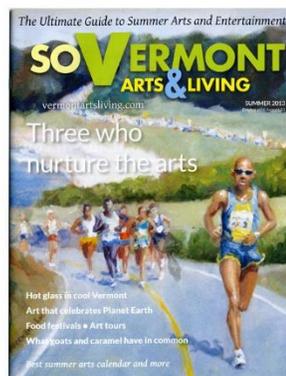
Conner's paintings are widely exhibited in juried, group and solo exhibits. His work has been included in many national juried exhibits including the New England Watercolor Society National Biennial, Adirondacks National Exhibition of American Watercolors, and the Hudson Valley Art Association Annual National Exhibition, among others.

He is a Signature Member of both the New England and Vermont Watercolor Societies and an Artist Member of the North Shore Arts Association and New York's venerable Salmagundi Club.

He is profiled in "100 Artists of New England", Schiffer Publishing, 2011, "Best of Artists' – American Landscape", Kennedy Publishing, 2012, and in "Three Who Nurture The Arts", Southern Vermont Arts & Living Magazine, Summer 2013 and "Learn From What Isn't Working", Plein Air Magazine Aug/Sep 2015.



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