

EQUIPMENT: ONLINE PAINTING COURSE

Painting realistic botanical watercolours

with Sophie Crossart

(Language: English)

In this PDF I am happy to give you some explanations and recommendations about your equipment. Just take a look at what you already have at home, or what you might still want to get. These recommendations are intended primarily as guidelines, not as rules. Equipment is always personal and there are many different options that produce great results on any budget. Remember: no equipment can do the work for you, but it can make painting easier. We do the work ourselves, with a lot of getting used to and practice. Having patience with ourselves and enjoying the process are the keys to growth!

Equipment Summary:

- *Laptop or Tablet with internet connection*
- *3 Watercolour brushes “round” (size in mm.: 1, 2.5, 3+)*
- *1 Synthetic Flat brush (size in mm: 5 mm)*
- *1 Old/simple brush for mixing*
- *Watercolour paper “Hot Press/Satiniert” (Size A5-A4).*
- *Watercolour paints*
- *Simple water container*
- *Simple palette*
- *Kitchen towels*
- *Drawing equipment: HB pencil, eraser, ruler, pencil sharper.*

Brushes

Botanical artists prefer brushes that can hold a fair amount of paint, but are also fine-tipped for detailed brushwork. The shape you are looking for is “round” and elongated, like the tip of a spear. We occasionally also use stronger, square shaped brushes to remove lines, spots or lift paint. Spare your best brushes by using an old brush when mixing paint.

Brush shape: “round” with a sharp tip.

Brush size: different brands use different size designations. A number 1 by *Winsor & Newton* does have the same thickness as a *Raphael*. If possible, pay attention to the width information in millimeters (this is measured at the ferrule of the brush — where the hairs are tied together).

Quantity: for a good basis you need a brush in the range of 2-3mm thickness. You can then add larger and smaller brushes, and fit your collection to your own preferences (the rougher and larger surfaces you like to paint, the bigger the brushes you will need).

For painting in life size, I recommend starting with three brushes:

- Brush width: 1 mm (for the finest details!)
- Brush width: 2-2.5 mm (for details and surfaces)
- Brush width: 3 mm (for larger wet-on-wet areas, and rougher glazes/layers).

Additionally recommended:

- a synthetic flat brush (up to 5 mm wide) to remove irregular edges or to lift lines.
- a soft cat tongue brush (5mm wide) to blend out sharp edges.

Some brand examples:

Rosemary & Co brushes, for example Series 8

Winsor & Newton Series 7 (“normal”, or for dry techniques also “miniature”)

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Raphael 8408
Raphael 8404, 8402
Da Vinci brushes

Natural or synthetic:

Traditional sable brushes are strong and flexible, and will hold their shape over a long time. In comparison, synthetic brushes are quicker to lose their sharp tips. However, better and better synthetic brushes are being developed. Trying out what suits your style and budget is totally fine.

Paints

I always advise my students to use "professional" or "extra fine" watercolours whenever possible. These colours are higher in pigment content and therefore make it much easier to achieve deep a colour intensity in your paintings. They also last longer. For my courses, it is perfectly fine if you already have watercolour paints at home that you want to try out first.

Some brand examples (often used by botanical artists):

Winsor & Newton Professional
Daniel Smith
Sennelier
Schmincke Horadam

Tubes or Pans:

Most paints are available in both tubes and pans. Both have their advantages and disadvantages (e.g. pans are easy to transport and immediately ready to use, but tubes make it easier to mix intense colours and keep the paints clean). The quality is the same and which one you choose is personal.

Especially with the professional paints, you do not need large quantities. 1/2 pans and 5-14 ml tubes last quite a long time. I have been using many of my 14 ml tubes for several years now. If you want to try certain colours for the first time, 5 ml tubes will do just fine. You won't waste paint with tubes either. You can always re-wet and re-use any paints you have applied from the tubes to the edge of your palette.

Palette, Water containers & Kitchen towel

Nothing beats a plain white ceramic plate as a palette. It offers plenty of space for mixing colours, it is easy to clean and has a nice and smooth surface that lets you see exactly what shades you are mixing.

When it comes to water containers, you can easily get by with household items. Well-washed drinking glasses or old jars work perfectly (the bigger and wider, the better). It's worth using one container for brush cleaning, and another one for clean water to moisten the paper when using wet-in-wet techniques..

You'll also need a cloth or kitchen towels, to wipe the brushes if necessary, and clean kitchen towels to occasionally lift off pigments from your painting.

Paper

Botanical artists need strong, smooth papers. We often paint in layers and need the paper to endure this process. Look for paper with a weight of 300 gsm, preferably 100% cotton fibre. The designation you are look for is “hot press”. This smooth type of paper is perfect for retaining fine detail and sharp lines.

Some examples of papers often used by botanical artists are:

Saunders Waterford

Farbriano Artistico

Arches

Hahnemuhle Britannia

Canson Heritage

Alternative: 100% cotton paper gives the best results. However, if you are looking for a cheaper alternative, then focus on thickness (minimum 300 gsm), an “archival” quality (acid free), and a “hot press” finish, such as:

Bockingford “Hot Press”.

Sketchbooks like the *Stillmann & Birn*, *Zeta* series also work very well.

Size: For my online courses, a size of at least A5 to A4 is sufficient.

Further optional equipment: Daylight Lamp

Natural daylight is the perfect form of light for painting botanical subjects. It makes colour and form look natural. When daylight becomes scarce, you may find it helpful to invest in a Daylight lamp, which enables you to paint and see accurate hues and tones until well after sunset.

Have fun and relax!

All information above are recommendations and examples only — I have no business relationship with any of the brands mentioned. Many of the brands mentioned are simply among the best in their category and are often used by botanical artists. However, they are not reserved for professionals only; they increase the fun and ease of painting for everyone.

The brands and types mentioned above also serve as a way for you to compare what you might already have at home, or to find suitable alternatives. Equipment is always personal and there are many different options that produce great results on any budget.

Please remember that the equipment we use does not do the work for us. We do the work ourselves, with a lot of practice and getting used to. Being patient with ourselves and enjoying the process are the keys to growth. You can do it!

Have fun painting!

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