



ULTIMATE E-BOOK

The Complete Beginner's Guide to Watercolor



Hey, artist! I'm stoked you're here so I can share with you the WONDERFUL world of watercolor.

It's my goal to help you overcome the hurdles and overwhelm that comes with getting started with watercolor!

If you're brand new to watercolor or even if you've been painting for a while, getting stuck is frustrating! I've been there. One of the biggest challenges I see new artists face when it comes to watercolor is knowing how to get started, which tutorials to watch and which techniques to focus on.

Good direction, tips and tutorials are the key to success with this medium! And that's likely what you're here for, hooray!! But sifting through the thousands of tutorials and pieces of content online is no easy task.

Thankfully, I've simplified the process, so it doesn't have to take ages to find the tips and guidance you need for understanding the world of watercolor.

Quick Disclosure: Some of these links happen to be affiliate links which means when you click the link to purchase something in this document, it won't cost you more but I may receive a commission for sharing this with you...which is great, because I was going to share it with you anyway! My work is also sponsored by Princeton, St. Cuthbert's Mill, and Maimeri.



Hey! I'm Jenna!

I'm a watercolor artist, surface pattern designer, and illustrator, born-and-raised in California. What started as a stress-relieving activity from a desk job in finance, quickly turned into the creative business of my dreams. Art unlocked something in me that changed every aspect of my life. I now inspire hundreds of thousands of people to find and express their own creative voice through my YouTube Channel, best-selling watercolor how-to books, art retreats, and online courses.



JENNARAINNEY.COM



In the following pages you'll find:

- Supplies I suggest and what to look out for
- Foundations of color theory, elements of building a harmonious color palette for your pieces and more
- A big breakdown of the two main techniques in watercolor painting: wet-on-wet and wet-on-dry; and pigment and water ratios
- How to use your brushes to achieve certain looks and effects, compound strokes and brush control tips
- Step-by-step instructions for loose florals, landscapes and more
- Troubleshooting all of your biggest watercolor questions like, "Am I using too much water?", "Why is the pigment separating?", and "How do I mix THIS color?"



Throwback!

The image directly above and below this text are a little peek at some of my first floral watercolor work. I had no grasp on which supplies to use or what wet-on-wet technique was, but I had caught the bug! Painting became my nightly routine at my kitchen table and then soon blossomed into a full-blown obsession and career!





"Why Watercolor?" You Ask.

It's simply the best (sung to Tina Turner's "Simply the Best" tune)!! Watercolor is juicy, magical, transparent and literally has a mind of its own. It's a lesson in *letting go of control* (ruh-roh) and becoming more free and in flow! It's my favorite medium to just *watch* and it has allowed me to become a better, more in-tune artist.

Can it be frustrating? Absolutely. Everything that requires practice will have the sting of growing pains at times. But the real trick here is to continually remind yourself of the phrase my mom used to always say to me: "*How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.*"

Be gracious with yourself as you work through these pages and don't forget to **HAVE FUN!**



Video Companion!

Scan the QR code above or [click here](#) for the "Complete Beginner's Guide to Watercolor" YouTube Video!! Perfect to watch along (ahem, fo' free!) while you work through this e-book!



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WHAT SUPPLIES TO USE

AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Let's be real here.

Every artist is different and is going to have their own distinct preferences when it comes to supplies, where to buy them and why they use them. However, one thing I've found as common ground on this topic is this:

Having good supplies will produce better results. Period, end of story.

Did I say you must buy the most expensive supplies out there?

No, but quality does make a difference. Why is that?

Well, **first of all**, if you're not enjoying the results you're seeing when you practice, you're not going to enjoy the process of painting as much as you could with more quality supplies. This is huge.

Are there corners to cut or ways to ensure you don't break the bank for your supply tool box? Absolutely. But first, to really understand what to look for when buying supplies, where to splurge and what to avoid, then let me break down each element of the painting process (paint, brushes, paper and more) to start you off on the right foot!

LET'S TALK PAINT.

The best watercolor paint for YOU is going to be the one you can afford and that's going to be most appropriate for the stage of learning you're at.

STUDENT/COTMAN LEVEL VS. PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

Higher quality watercolor paint is going to equal a much more enjoyable process and easier learning curve.

It may be tempting to cut corners on costs with paint by just snagging the random set at Walmart or Michaels. But trust me, you'll end up purchasing those higher-end, quality paints down the road anyways and telling yourself, "Man, I should've just bought these from the get-go."

The beauty about watercolor paint is that it's a long-term investment. If used properly, you can use and reuse watercolor paint and get a really long stretch out of one tube or pan. For example, a 14mL tube of professional level watercolor paint might seem small, but I paint every single day and it would take me about 6-9 months to go through this whole tube.

Why is this?

Well, watercolor paint is typically made from pigments, substances like ochre or charcoal, minerals, rocks, etc. This powder is combined with some form of binding agent, usually gum arabic and some other fillers.

When a watercolor paint is considered high quality, that usually means that the pigment used is either rare and harder to find, or there's more pigment in the tube or pan compared to the student or Cotman version of that same color.

For example, Cobalt Blue Professional Level paint is more expensive than the Cobalt Blue Student Level product from the same brand, same 14mL tube because the student level product has more filler and less pigment! Because of this, the vibrancy of the pigment suffers and it doesn't blend, bloom and bleed like the professional level product will. Is the price of the student level hue significantly cheaper than the professional level? Yep! But if you want to enjoy the process of painting with watercolor and love the results you're getting, you may have an easier time with the professional level paint.

Now, I'm not saying that student level paint is never acceptable. Remember, every artist is different and will have different preferences. I know plenty of painters out there who use the "cheaper" paint and have a great time with it. Ultimately though, with professional vs. non-professional, you will see a difference in pigmentation and the way it blends and bleeds on paper.



MORE ON PAINT...

WATERCOLOR PAINT TYPES

Watercolor comes in many forms, shapes and sizes, so let's go through all the different types and the pros and cons for each.

Watercolor Pans

Some artists absolutely love working with pan sets like the one by Maimeri (really great quality and what I used in my recent retreats). There's no major difference between working with the tubes of paint vs. pans if you're buying the same quality, brand and colors. It's the exact same, except for the fact that it's already in pans...but here's my pros and cons list:

Pros:

- Compact and super easy to travel with. We love that!!
- Ready to paint right away. No waiting for the colors to dry in the dishes!
- You can make your own pan set if you buy individual pans

Cons:

- Usually the pans in the set are too close together, making it difficult to use bigger brushes without creating muddy colors.
- With the pre-made pan sets, there may be colors you don't use as often for your style.

Watercolor Tubes

This is the type of watercolor pigment I work with the most.

I'm a huge fan of the MaimeriBlu Professional Level Watercolor Tubes (all the colors I use and how I arrange them in my palette are shown in my YouTube video [HERE](#)). I basically create my own set by squeezing about a quarter size amount into the dishes of this palette. Then I let the pigment dry in the dishes! Just like a pan set where the watercolor paint comes dried in half pans or full pans, I'm essentially creating a custom pan set with the colors I know and love! Too much gushing on watercolor tubes, so let's get into the pros and cons list:

Pros:

- Get the exact color you want. There are millions (exaggeration maybe?) of different colors that come in tubes of watercolor paint. It can be overwhelming, but this makes it easier to completely customize your palette and get exactly what you want.
- Easier to keep clean. You're using an actual palette and not a pan set so there's space to roam and mix in the mixing wells. There's also usually more space between the dishes where the paint sits, so it won't get as messy.
- Just like the pan sets, paint from watercolor tubes can be reactivated by adding water! So economical and this also makes it easy to travel with!

Cons:

- Can be annoying to have to wait for the colors to dry (even though you CAN use the paint straight from the tube!).
- More \$++. Tubes of paint are typically more money than just buying a pre-made pan set.
- Takes up more space in your office/studio/house. Tubes everywhere!

FOR A FULL LIST OF MY SUPPLIES CHECK:

JENNARAINEY.COM/AMAZON
JENNARAINEY.COM/Blick

Liquid Watercolor

I'm OBSESSED with Liquid Watercolor paint right now. I'll save the why for the "pros" list below, but if you're wondering what it is, liquid watercolor is typically dye based ink or acrylic ink that's water soluble. My favorite sets are from Daler Rowney and Bombay (all linked in my Amazon shop: jennarainey.com/amazon). I also like using the white Bombay ink for details or mixing up pastel colors! I prefer mixing and matching from all three of these sets and using an eyedropper to combine the colors into concoctions that I save in these plastic jars. Now let's get into the pros and cons for this type of watercolor paint:

Pros:

- So friggin vibrant!
- Wet-on-wet technique, bleeding and blooms are like mini explosions. Way more explosive than using the same technique with tubes or pans!
- Because it's dye, the color is VERY concentrated...a little bit goes a very long way.

Cons:

- Super staining. Again, since these are dyes, they pretty much stain the paper right away...which is fine if you don't want to lift any color! They also stain plastic palettes, which is fine if you don't mind a "messy" palette. Just something to be aware of.
- The lightfast quality doesn't compare to tubes or pans. This type of paint fades much quicker, so if you're selling your original paintings using this type of paint, maybe tell your customers to not hang the piece in direct sunlight!
- More expensive than pan sets and tubes...but WORTH IT, IMO!

- Pretty much impossible to use once they dry. This is why I use the plastic jars to save the colors instead of mixing up a batch in my palette. Once these colors dry, you cannot reactivate them with water like the others!

Photo of my watercolor inks assembled in plastic jars with swatch cards! I have the ones I love plus these exact jars linked in my Amazon shop [here](#)!



WHAT ELSE TO WATCH OUT FOR...

Lightfastness

Each color is going to have a "lightfastness grade" on the tube or information about the color in the set. Basically this "level" or "grade" refers to how quickly this particular color will fade in the sun.

The ratings are I, II, III, and IV, with I being the best and IV being the worst. But just because a color has a "bad" lightfastness grade, doesn't totally mean you should never use it. Let me explain.

Opera Rose is a color known for its vibrancy and neon pink quality. Colors that are more vibrant and hard to mix up manually are typically poor in lightfastness. But don't fret! Just store these colors in darker areas. If you're painting with them, it's great to scan and work with digital versions of these colors vs. hanging up the piece in your home. If you are going to frame an original painting with colors that have a poor lightfastness rating, just make sure they're framed behind glass (not plexi or plastic), and are not in direct sunlight as they will fade quickly!

Fugitive Colors

This is an expansion on the above term. The colors that have the worst lightfastness rating (aka *Opera Rose*) are considered fugitive colors. If a color has the word "permanent" or "hue" in the name, it's fugitive. Again, this doesn't mean you need to avoid them altogether. These are typically some of the most fun colors to use. Just know they're sensitive to light and are best scanned!

Toxicity

Watercolor paint can contain some ingredients that are toxic and potentially harmful to inhale or touch. You'd need to ingest or basically cover your body in paint for it to be harmful, but I am still very mindful of keeping my body as clean as possible (hello autoimmune diseases!), so I have an Air Doctor filter in my office that's always running and cleaning the air AND I either use gloves when working with more toxic colors or avoid touching them at all costs.

If you're really concerned about toxicity though, there's a great non-toxic paint set and some great cadmium free colors from my favorite watercolor pigments, MaimeriBlu. Not every color, but a lot in the line are much cleaner than most.

What brand is the best?

As you can probably tell by this ebook thus far, I'm not monogamous when it comes to watercolor paint brands and types. I love to mix and match and use colors from a variety of brands and heck, I even love throwing gouache paint into the mix!!

With that said, I do think I've found the BEST quality and most fun types/brands to play with, so definitely check out my [Amazon store](http://jennarainey.com/amazon) (jennarainey.com/amazon) so you can look into them. Play around and see what you prefer! Every artist is different and you never know what you're going to fall in love with!



LET'S TALK BRUSHES.

Looking for the best watercolor brushes can be an overwhelming task. There are so many opinions, brands and styles of brushes that it can be difficult to actually know if you're choosing the right brush. If you've been following my blog or YouTube channel for a while, then you'll know I'm a **HUGE** fan of Princeton brushes, specifically the Heritage 4050 series for my watercolor paintings. But I've been mixing up the style and shape of brush I use in the last few years, so let's break it down.

The Glossary of Terms with Brushes

SNAP

This is measured by how well a brush "snaps" back to its original shape or parallel after it's bent. I use synthetic hair brushes for this reason because often, natural hair brushes are too soft to have a good snap!

SPRING

How well a brush holds its shape when you're applying different watercolor techniques or dragging it across your paper. If the hair of the brush remains bent for longer, it has a good spring!

CAPACITY/LOAD

How much water a brush can hold. This will vary depending on the size and shape of the brush, but certain series and brands of brushes will have a better capacity than others.

Hair Types

SYNTHETIC VS. NATURAL HAIR

There are pros and cons to using both synthetic and natural hair brushes. I personally prefer synthetic hair brushes for the price point and the fact that they don't come from harming animals. Neither are great for the environment, so it's important that when choosing a brush, you know how to take care of it so it lasts a lifetime!

SABLE

This is the most coveted and prized hair for watercolor brushes, especially Kolinsky Sable. If you're a natural hair brush person, this is what you want to look for. This type of hair is best for round shape brushes because of the snap. The Princeton Heritage 4050 series is a *synthetic* sable hair brush and is a fraction of the cost of natural sable hair brushes.

SQUIRREL

This one is similar to sable hair, but softer and they're not as spring-y as the prized sable hair. I love a good synthetic squirrel hair brush for mop brushes or covering a large surface area! Obviously you can use the natural squirrel hair, I'm just not a natural hair brush person.

HOG

Really stiff and coarse hair. I'd really only use this hair in a flat brush because I like a lot of bounce or spring when I'm painting.

Hair Types Cont.

GOAT

This hair is traditionally used in Japanese calligraphy and wash brushes. Brushes with this type of hair don't usually form a crisp point.

OX

Another hair I'd only use for flat brushes because of the stiffness. This type of hair is really great for dry brush texture though!

Brush Shapes

ROUND

One of my favorites and the most diverse and versatile shape. A 2-in-1 stroke brush! The tip of the brush comes to a fine point, and when you use the "belly" or width of the brush, you can get a nice, fat stroke. In my opinion, every watercolor artist should have at least 2 different size round brushes in their selection – a size 6 and size 16. My Princeton Heritage 4050 series rounds are my ride or dies.

FILBERT

I started using filbert brushes roughly 10 years into my painting journey and they changed my life. I always thought I was a round brush girl, but filbert might just beat the rounds for my favorite. This is definitely my favorite brush shape for painting flowers! Having a size 8 filbert and especially the new size 12 Blooms brush is where it's at. I recommend the Princeton Velvet Touch Filbert brushes.

FOR A FULL LIST OF MY SUPPLIES CHECK:

JENNARAINNEY.COM/AMAZON
JENNARAINNEY.COM/BLICK

DAGGER

A flat brush, but make it slanted. The only difference between a flat brush and detail brush is the sharp edge or corner you can use for painting details.

FLAT

These brushes are most commonly used in washes, stripes and more linear strokes and shapes. I love the Princeton Aqua Elite series flat brushes, specifically the Mottler!

MOP

Think really fat bellies. These brushes are typically made of squirrel (natural or synthetic) hair and are great for drinking up lots of water and still keeping a good point. I personally will always choose a round brush over a mop brush because mop brushes are more difficult to control.

DETAIL

The most common detail brushes are riggers and spotters. The main difference between the two is riggers have longer hair or bristles than spotters. If you're going to splurge on any type of brush, you want to make sure to invest in a really good quality detail brush. Riggers will give you longer loads because the hair is longer. Think thin lines and larger details, while spotters are great for smaller details.



HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT BRUSH

Having good brushes in your arsenal can literally change and impact your art for better or for worse. I know I've talked about how important quality paint is, and you'll hear me spiel about having good paper as well, but **if I were stranded on a deserted island and could only take ONE art supply with me, it would be a good brush.**

Let's talk about some of my favorite brands, what to look out for when you're trying a new brush for the first time and more!



GETTING STARTED

ADDING TOOLS TO YOUR TOOLBOX!

If you're starting from scratch and don't want to break the bank, my advice is always to go for 1 small brush (like a detail brush or a round size 2), 1 medium round brush (size 6 is my fave!), 1 large round (size 16), a medium size Filbert brush (size 8 or the BLOOMS 12) and a large wash/flat brush (Mottler from Aqua Elite).

This will give you a well rounded collection and get you painting anything from flowers to landscapes, portraits to objects in both loose and realistic styles. Brush styles, hair and shape will have an impact on the subject matter you paint, so let's talk about that a bit more to help you add the right tools to your toolbox!

In terms of knowing which brush to use for particular moments in a painting or techniques, keep in mind the tips above and ask yourself these questions:

What's the main goal for this stroke?

Smooth coverage?

Small details?

Dry texture?

Compound strokes without having to dip in water between?

Next I'm going to list out a few of my favorite brands and the pros and cons of each to help you make the most accurate decision on a brush for your painting needs!

FOR A FULL LIST OF MY SUPPLIES CHECK:

JENNARAINEY.COM/AMAZON
JENNARAINEY.COM/BLICK



PRINCETON HERITAGE

Pros:

- Durability and spring. The springiest brush I've found and probably the main reason I love this series so much. I like to paint with bounce, what can I say? *Bend and snap!*
- Holds a lot of water. Similarly to the Aqua Elite series below, this series also holds lots of water, though not as much as Aqua Elite.
- Great price. Comparing to natural sable hair brushes, this synthetic series is comparable in performance, but a MUCH lower price point.

Cons:

- Fine points. The points on these brushes are great, but not needlepoint. So if you like to do lots of intricate detail work, these brushes won't give you that extra sharp point.

PRINCETON VELVET TOUCH

Pros:

- Durability and spring. Not as springy as the Heritage series, but still good.
- Great price. Comparing to natural sable hair brushes, this synthetic series is comparable in performance, but a MUCH lower price point.
- The soft, velvety handle is nice!

Cons:

- I would love more Filbert sizes in this series because the size 8 and 12 are awesome.

PRINCETON AQUA ELITE

Pros:

- Durability. This series was made for spreading and dragging your brush across any texture of paper and made to last long.
- Holds a lot of water. The main feature for this brush series is its ability to hold water. This is a thirsty brush! So if you're into painting landscapes or use a lot of wet-on-wet technique, this is a fabulous brush.
- Great price. Fantastic brush for the quality and technology!
- Huge range. You'll find a huge range of size and shapes in this series from mottlers and daggers to round brushes of all sizes.



AQUA ELITE CONTINUED

Cons:

- Very soft bristles. Because this series is known for its ability to hold tons of water, the hair is something to get used to. It's much softer than the Heritage series brushes. This isn't necessarily an issue, it's just a learning curve.

WINSOR & NEWTON COTMAN SHORT HANDLE

Pros:

- Snappy. The hair on these brushes is nice and stiff, but holds its shape well.
- Nice points. These brushes are great for detail work and offer a great point.

Cons:

- Short handle. This is more of a preference thing, but the short handles can be a problem if you like to work with big sweeping strokes and prefer a longer handle.
- Not a good hold. This series doesn't have a good round brush that holds a lot of water. If you're used to working with round brushes like I am, you'll be disappointed in this range unless you can get used to dipping in water more frequently.

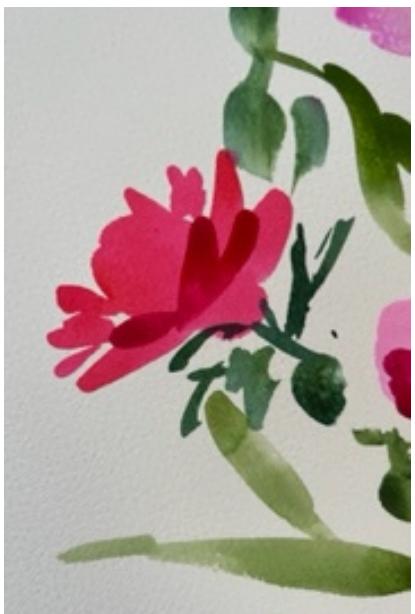
DA VINCI MAESTRO

Pros:

- Holds a lot of water. Similar to the Aqua Elite series, this brush is great at holding water!
- Extra sharp point. Like sharper than a knife. These points are long and clean and great for detailed work!
- Snappy. Very durable, stiff hair that snaps well back into shape.

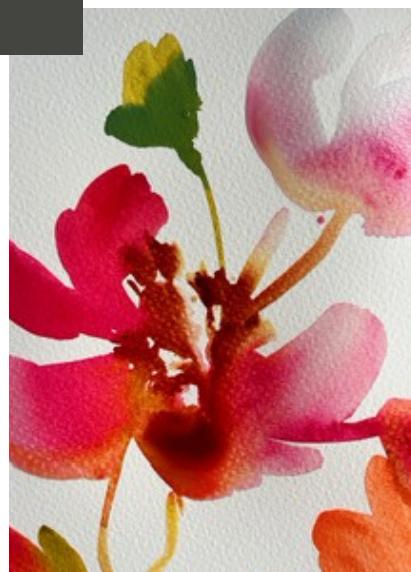
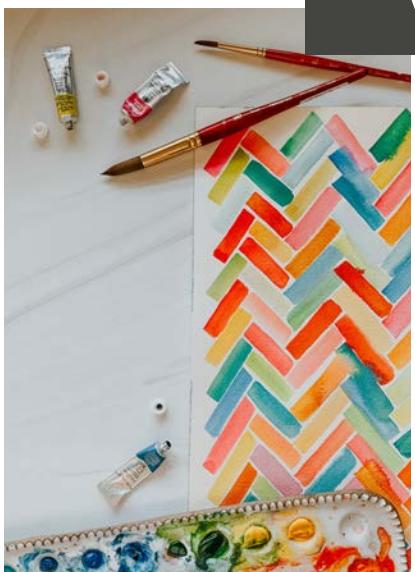
Cons:

- No detail brush. This brand doesn't offer a detail brush, however, their round brushes do offer the extra sharp point to compensate for that.
- Short handle. This is more of a preference thing, but the short handles can be a problem if you like to work with big sweeping strokes and prefer a longer handle.
- Price. These are natural and not synthetic hair so while they're high quality, their starting prices are significantly higher than the other synthetic brushes above.



[OR CLICK HERE](#)

Do's and Don'ts of Watercolor Brushes



NOW LET'S TALK PAPER.

Wondering which type of paper to choose from between Cold Press and Hot Press? Unsure of what that means or if there's a less expensive paper out there for you to practice on?

I got you.



THE MOST IMPORTANT

ADDING TOOLS TO YOUR TOOLBOX!

I constantly get asked: "*What is more important—quality paper, paint or brushes?*"

And you know what my answer is?

Paper.

Then the next question is: "*Which is the best watercolor paper??*"

Paper is one of the biggest factors in the appearance of colors, how water and pigments pool, blend and dry and so much more.

While working with great paint and brushes is highly recommended, not having a good surface to work on, painting can be dull, unenjoyable and frustrating.

There are a few different criteria to look for when shopping for watercolor paper, from quality to texture, tinting and format. Below you'll find links to favorite brands and descriptions of what to pay attention to when you're shopping!

Quality

Just like brushes and paint, there are two types of quality when it comes to watercolor paper: artist level and student level. Artist quality paper is also known as *archival paper*. It's acid free, built to last and can be way more enjoyable when painting.

FOR A FULL LIST OF MY SUPPLIES CHECK:

JENNARAINEY.COM/AMAZON
JENNARAINEY.COM/Blick



Surface or Texture

This aspect of watercolor paper is more subjective. There are three different types of textures that come with watercolor paper: hot-pressed, cold-pressed (my preference) and rough. Like I said, this one depends on your personal style of painting and preferred feel and I recommend checking out all three. **For me, cold-pressed is the perfect in-between texture.** It's not too smooth like hot-pressed and not too textured like rough paper. It's got a nice toothy texture that will help keep the pigment and water in place, but not too rough to the point where all of my strokes are looking dry and spotty.

However, because I like to work with a decent amount of water and paint wet-on-wet quite often, my work looks completely different on hot-pressed and rough and yours may not!

Tinting

For the most part, all watercolor paper is either bright white, white or cream. I prefer bright white as it helps illuminate the transparent quality of watercolor pigments. It's also a nice contrast against the brighter, more vibrant colors I paint with. If you want a more subtle or natural look, you may want to go with an off white or cream! There's also black watercolor paper, which would be interesting to try! You can see me paint with black watercolor paper in [this video](#) (or search black watercolor paper on my channel)!

Format

When you go to an art supply store, you may notice there are a bunch of different types of formats for watercolor paper. There are blocks, pads, loose sheets and rolls. **My preference is always blocks unless I'm wanting to paint something really large, then I'll do loose sheets.** The reason I don't like working on pads of watercolor paper is because of the warping and buckling. Blocks of paper are glued down on the sides and help prevent this from happening. If you don't purchase a pad, you'll want to work on one sheet and tape it down on your table or some sort of working surface with painter's tape.



FOR A FULL LIST OF MY SUPPLIES CHECK:

JENNARAINEY.COM/AMAZON
JENNARAINEY.COM/BLICK



MY TOP PICKS

MY FAVORITE PAPER BRANDS!

Saunders Waterford

My go-to paper right now.

Arches

Obviously this is the GOAT. Sometimes the texture of the cold-pressed paper is a liiiiittle on the rough side. But it's AWESOME.

Bockingford

A more budget-friendly paper made by the same brand as Saunders mentioned above.

Fabriano

This was the paper I used when I was first learning watercolor. It's a dream!

WONDERING IF THERE'S A LESS EXPENSIVE PAPER OUT THERE YOU CAN PRACTICE ON? SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ MY BREAKDOWN ON THIS TOPIC!



  SCAN ME

OR CLICK HERE

FOR A FULL LIST OF MY SUPPLIES CHECK:

JENNARAINEY.COM/AMAZON
JENNARAINEY.COM/BICK

COLOR THEORY

Understanding how colors correspond with one another (aka color theory) has been THE biggest transformation for me and how I paint. Knowing what colors to mix up and what to paint and when to create harmony has built so much confidence and allowed me to progress with art much faster than before.

And I know it can help you, too.



The color wheel is an extremely helpful resource for crafting custom palettes and understanding what colors to use and when. When I started studying the relationships between colors and which combinations are harmonious and which ones would cause strain or disharmony, the game completely changed.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

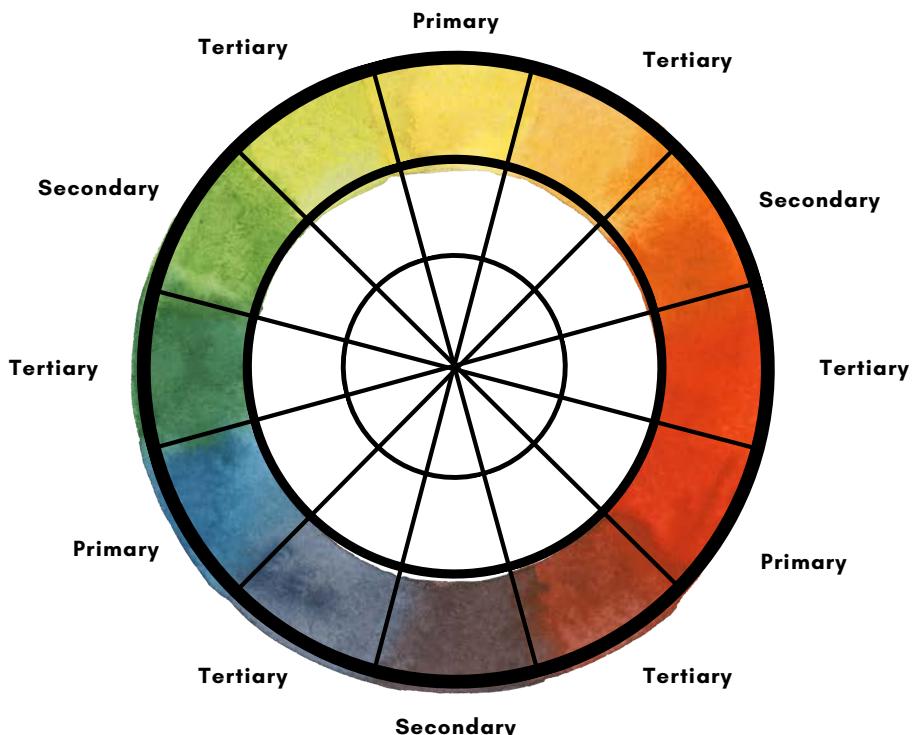
Color theory is important because it's crucial to know how to mix a custom palette, how to match colors and the reasons why warm and cool shades can affect the mood of a piece. It's also a total superhero trick to be able to replicate colors you see in real life on your paper!

To get going on this subject, let's first breakdown the main elements of colors:

Primary Colors: the 3 pigment colors that cannot be mixed or formed by any combinations of other colors. All other colors are derived from the 3 hues **red, blue and yellow.**

Secondary Colors: the colors formed by mixing two primary colors which includes **orange, green and violet.**

Tertiary Colors: the colors formed by mixing a primary and a secondary color. These have a hyphen in the name, for example, **red-orange, yellow-orange, red-violet, blue-green, etc.**



Complimentary Colors

These are located directly across from each other on the color wheel. When mixed together, you can mute or desaturate the strength of the colors, making it muddy or more brown, black or gray.

If we think about opposites in terms of human relationships, it can either be incredible (think peanut butter and jelly), or absolutely awful (think, never invite those two people to the same party people). The same goes for complementary colors -- this is why they're called both complementary and contrasting!

If red and green, for example are used ineffectively with each other in the same piece, it can cause too much strain and competition and will force people to look away from the piece. With contrasting colors, as I mentioned before, one color in the combination will always be warm and the other cool. When we look at the color wheel and split it in half from Violet to Yellow, one side is cool and the other, warm! So if you're ever unsure about which cup of water to rinse off a specific color, refer back to this color wheel!



SCAN ME

OR CLICK HERE

WANT A REAL DEEP-DIVE ON COLOR THEORY KNOWLEDGE? SCAN THIS QR CODE AND WATCH MY VIDEO ON THE SUBJECT!



PAINTING TECHNIQUES.

If you're anything like me, you're probably tempted to skip over the "technique" section of the ebook and just get straight to painting. DON'T DO IT! Before we get to the fun stuff ahead in this ebook, it's incredibly important that we study the technical stuff first in order to grasp how to control pigment and water, when to use certain techniques and more.



WET-ON-WET TECHNIQUE

GET READY FOR MAGIC!

This particular painting technique is when either wet pigment or just water are used to touch another area of wet pigment or water. This is the most dominant technique I use throughout my process in both abstraction and realistic styles of painting and will be discussed in this ebook quite a bit.

Wet-on-wet (WOW) technique can be difficult to perfect. A lot of beginning watercolorists struggle with water control: too much water used in this technique will prevent your pigment from blending or bursting well, it will just become stagnant (don't worry, I've got a helpful exercise for you coming!).

On the other hand, if you use not enough water, you will see hard edges and lines and no movement as well.

However, when the right amount of water is used for wet-on-wet, **magic happens!** The pigment will burst and spread and create a soft, diffused edge perfect for blending, shading, creating texture, and many more effects that we'll be practicing in this book.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Hard Edge - You see these two flowers right here? One is fuzzy (WOW) one is "hard" (WOD aka wet-on-dry!).





Blooms - Created when dropping clean water into paint or vice versa to spread and push the paint using wet-on-wet technique.

Backruns - Usually occurring accidentally, this is when a drop of water falls into some wet paint and creates a bloom, where the desired result was an even gradient or smooth coverage of paint and water.

Cauliflower - when water or paint that is wetter than what it's added to is applied to a semi-wet area and creates irregular splotches or marks like the effect below.

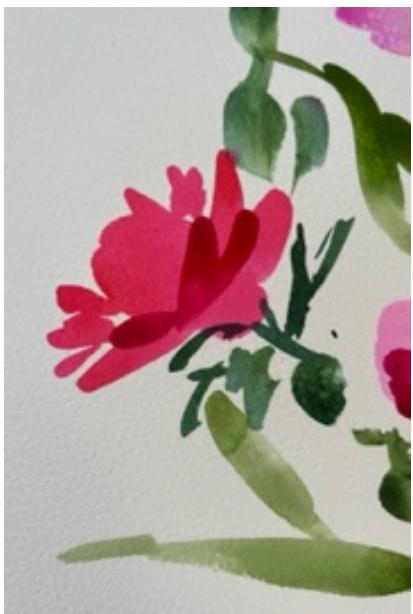


NOW LET'S TALK WET-ON-DRY!

LAYERS AND LAYERS OF LOVE

This technique is used to create depth with layers and is when wet paint is applied to dry paper or dry pigment. Most of the time in watercolor, you will be layering from light to dark, this way we can build up color, pattern and texture!

Let's look at some examples of WOD in action, shall we?



Layering on darker, more opaque details using wet-on-dry technique. I also love to use white gouache (an opaque watercolor medium) for an added pop to my florals (see the painting directly above)



SCAN ME

Scan this QR code to learn more about Wet-on-Wet technique!



OR CLICK HERE



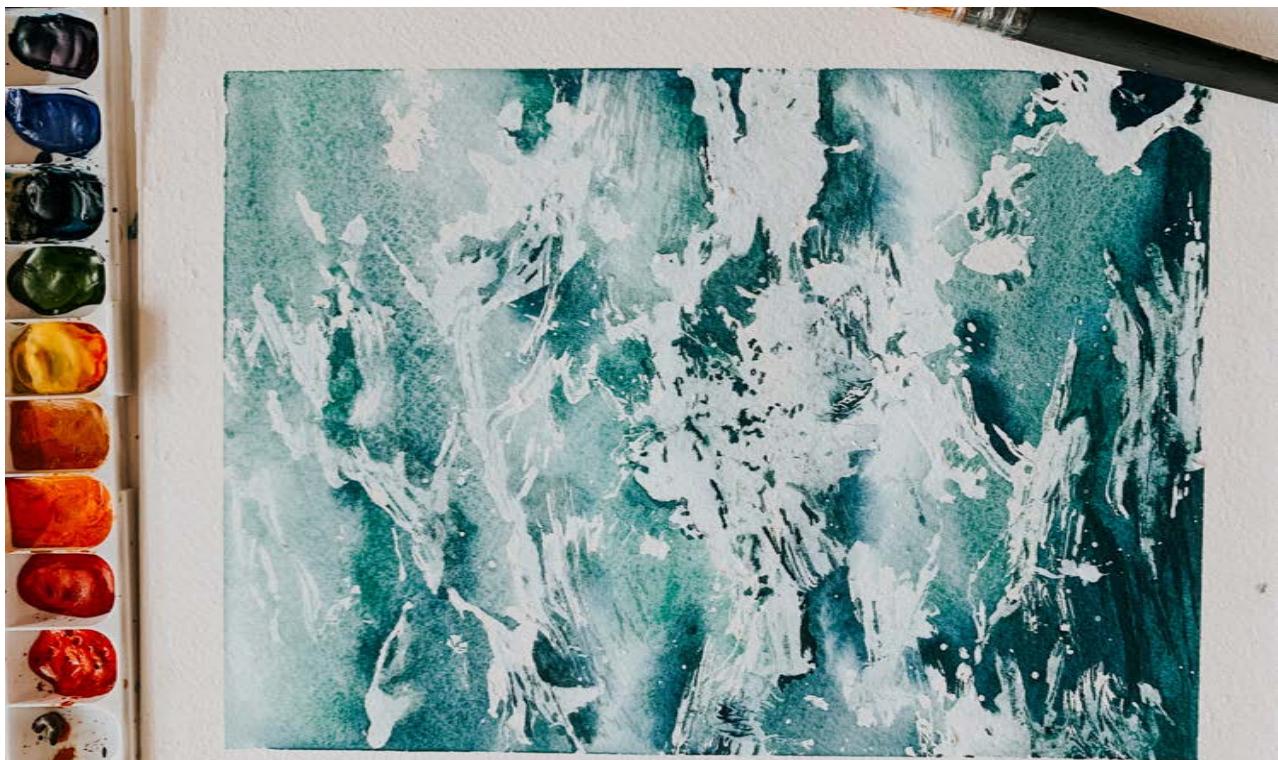
SCAN ME

Scan this QR code to learn more about Wet-on-Dry technique!



OR CLICK HERE





COLOR LIFTING

This technique can be used with a wide array of materials and is generally used to either create texture or lighten areas to create a stronger highlight. Below are a few methods and tools used to lift color

Scratching - For sharp highlights, an exacto knife or toothpick can be used to scratch out thin, tiny highlights

Dabbing - For a softer lift of color, using either a dry brush, q tip, or paper towel is perfect to get the job done. Always have one of these on hand while you're painting, so if you overdo an area with too much dark, you can lift it up while it's still wet!

Masking Fluid/Drawing Gum - a rubbery consistency material you add before painting to "save" your highlights. In the waves photo above I used masking fluid to save the "foam".

Highlighting - Most highlights are created with light pigments and done while painting. After a piece is done, I will occasionally add in tiny spots or veins, etc. with white gouache for highlights (see the whale shark below)! Gouache is an opaque form of watercolor and is perfect for creating a punch of bright white in areas that call for it.



LET'S PAINT!

Now that we've got all that technical stuff out of the way, it's time to bust out our supplies and paint together. We'll be working our way slowly through some water control exercises, value scales and then a couple of loose-style paintings that you can practice on your own and totally "WOW" your friends and family with!



HANDLING A BRUSH

Vertical Hold - For fine lines and details, hold your brush upright. The more pressure you apply to the brush, the thicker your lines will be and make sure to have a steady hand by resting the outside of your hand and forearm on the paper.

Slanted Hold - Hold your brush on its side to use the belly of the brush for creating washes and wider strokes. Similar to the vertical hold, always steady your hand by using the table and paper for support.

Compound Strokes - This type of stroke is created by applying both a slanted and vertical hold within one stroke. This is how most of my leaves are created when I'm painting in a loose style, so this is an incredibly important stroke to practice. It's much harder than it looks, so spend some time on this one!

To practice, start with a slanted hold on your brush and make sure the handle of your brush is pointing in the direction you will be painting this stroke. Apply pressure to your brush so that the hair fans out and you're able to obtain a large sweep of color.

As you pull your brush along, begin releasing pressure and gradually angling your brush to a vertical hold. You should see a stroke that starts wide and gradually comes to a point. You can extend this stroke for a longer leaf like for tulips, or make them shorter for rose leaves.



Scan this QR code or [click here](#) and learn more about compound strokes and painting leaves!





Above is an example of a compound stroke in action for painting petals. I'm applying pressure to the brush in the first step to make the hair get wider and then releasing that pressure to use the fine point of the brush for smaller lines.

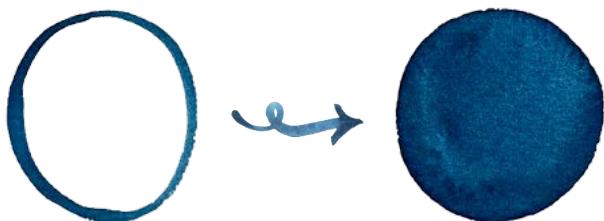


In this example, I am using a slanted hold at about 35° away from the paper in order to fill in this yellow-green box quickly with the width or belly of the brush.

CIRCLES!



STEP ONE: CREATE THE CIRCLE!



Using a vertical hold for the tip of your round brush (I used a size 6 for the piece on the left), outline your circle and then using a slanted hold, fill in the circle!

STEP TWO: BLOOMS

You can paint your circles in a straight line, or all over your paper in random arrangements, but always start away from the circle you want to touch with the next and then gradually increase the size of that circle so that the two barely touch and create a fun bleed or bloom!

TIPS!

Colors - If you're using both warm and cool colors, keep in mind that you will be incorporating contrasting/complimentary colors. If this is your first ever bubble piece, maybe try just using warm colors (reds, pinks, oranges, yellows) or just cools (blues, greens, violets) to help mitigate the stress of knowing which colors to put next. In general, try creating balance with your colors by separating similar colors and creating a "Z" shape. For example, the bright pink/red color in this piece on the left can be seen in the top row on the left, then on the right side in the middle row and back towards the left on the bottom row. This is creating a zig zag with that dominant color instead of a clump of all the same colors in one spot!

Values - Similarly to the tip above on color, you want to create balance with your light and dark *values* of a color in your piece! Having more transparent or lighter colors next to your darker, thicker colors is also a great way to add lots of contrast! You can get your lighter colors by adding more water to your mixture and darker colors by having more pigment than water to make them more buttery and thick!

Size - Vary the size of each of your circles to create movement in each row or throughout your piece!

FLOWERS!



Do you struggle with painting watercolor flowers?

If you've been watching tutorials on YouTube to help you paint flowers and you're not pleased with the outcome, you've come to the right place. I want to tell you about my top 6 principles that will transform your watercolor flowers.

6 PRINCIPLES OF WATERCOLOR FLOWERS

- Shape:** Before you even start painting, you want to think about the basic shape of that flower—whether it be a bell-shaped, cone-shaped, star-shaped, fan-shaped, etc.
- Anchor Point:** If you're painting a star-shaped flower, your anchor point is where that center stamen is. All the petals should be pointing back to this anchor point!

- White Space:** This is SO important, especially for loose-style watercolor. You need white space—not too much!—to differentiate petals and layers so it doesn't look like a blobby cloud.

- Detail:** Add detail at the right time and the right place. Think about an anemone and its dark center. If we add that blackish purple center too soon while the petals are super wet, then it will just bloom and blob. You need to wait and use wet on dry technique. Another way to add details is to come back after painting the watercolor layers and finish your piece with details in white gouache!

- Perspective:** Flowers aren't always facing you directly! You could be looking at them from the top-down or from the side. You want to add different perspectives so your piece has more movement and dimension.

- Composition:** My best tip is to split your paper into quadrants and paint floral shapes that follow an S-curve. More on that soon!



FLOWERS

STEP BY STEP!

Let's paint a rose!!

To get started, we're going to kick things off with a loose watercolor rose using the size 6 round brush from the Princeton Heritage 4050 series. The perspective or view point we'll be taking on this rose is straight on, looking directly into the center of the rose. The key with this flower is to start with thin, tightly wound strokes and then as the flower gets wider, painting thicker strokes in a lighter value to create those fluffy outside petals. The pigments I'm using below are a mix of Permanent Red Light and Quinacridone Red from MaimeriBlu to get a rich pink-red.



Step One:

Using a vertical hold and little pressure, start with a small circle and swirl around tightly with your thickest mixture of red.



Step Two:

Next, lighten the value of red with water and use pressure or a compound stroke to paint in the fluffier, wide petals on the outside.



Step Three:

Make sure these petals are right up against the inside, thin petals.



Step Four:

Each one of these petals should be a "C" curve shape and have very little white space between them but just enough to show they're separate.



Step Five:

For your leaf use the same size 6 brush, vertical hold to paint in a little stem for the base of the leaf.



Step Six:

Next, use a compound stroke, apply pressure and as you drag the brush through the leaf, gradually release pressure for a point.



Step Seven:

Complete the other side of the leaf starting at the exact same spot as the first side with pressure.



Step Eight:

The gradual release of pressure is what creates the curve in the outside of the leaf. This takes practice!

MY FAVORITE BRUSH FOR FLOWERS!

The perfect brush shape for the perfect petal shape

Story time. A couple years ago I started using Filbert brushes for flowers and it changed my life, but the brand I was using at the time just didn't have the snappiness in the brush that I was looking for...thus, the "Blooms" brush was born. It's a size 12 Filbert by Princeton, which I use for all of my bigger flowers like Peonies, Dahlias, Roses...literally anything! I still prefer using a round brush for painting stems and stamen details in the center of flowers to really get those thin strokes, but basically everything else in a floral painting is done with this brush now. She is QUEEN!



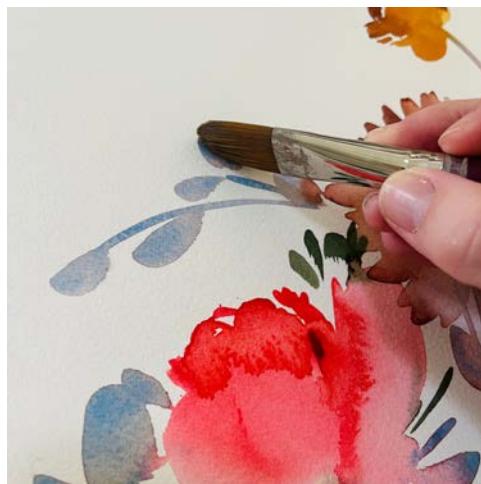
THE BLOOMS BRUSH IN ACTION!

Dahlias, Roses and Peonies OH MY!

Let's break down a couple different brush holds and how to properly use this brush for any type of loose floral you'd want to paint! Always make sure you are using the brush by pulling from the top of the petal inward to use the natural shape of the brush!



Flat + Slanted hold for wide petals and leaves petal. The rounded corners on the brush give it the perfect shape to match the shape of a petal or leaf!



Side + Slanted hold where you're using the corner or thin side of the brush shape is perfect for pointy Dahlia petals, thin leaves, stems and more!



PERSPECTIVE, VANTAGE POINT AND DEPTH OH MY!

Beach scenes and landscapes are some of my favorite things to paint! My third book, *Everyday Watercolor Seashores*, which comes out in Spring 2024 has tons of stuff in there on landscapes. But something I want to focus on in this free e-book is the importance of perspective and vantage point to create depth in your landscape paintings.

For example, understanding the point of view, eye level or perspective of the subject viewing the landscape is incredibly important. If we have a *low* horizon with tall people in the foreground where their knees meet the horizon line, then that tells us that the perspective is that being taken at knee level to the humans in the piece. In other words, we're taking the perspective of a smaller human like a child or maybe a dog.



However, if we take that same painting and horizon line and just paint the humans in the foreground to where their heads line up with the horizon line, guess what? We're taking the perspective from the same height as an adult human! Perspective is a **HUGE** part of what I teach in my online course titled [The Art Within](#). There's SO much to this, way more than what I can cover in a free e-book, so if you want more in-depth instruction on this, [check that out!](#)



CREATING DEPTH

MAKE VALUES YOUR BEST FRIEND

For a misty scene or to show that the background objects are further away than the foreground, I like to lay down a light, pale wash of my base color using the Aqua Elite Mottler brush. This is the best brush for landscapes and big washes because it's designed to hold a LOT of water and pigment, giving you lots of coverage with your strokes!

As I work my way from the foreground to the background adding trees or details to the scene, my *values* (aka the lightness and darkness of a color) fade as well. The painting on the left shows this well. The trees in the foreground are dark—I'm using a looooot of pigment on my brush in a buttery consistency and they even have more detail. As I work my way to the background and in the mist, my pigment to water ratio is mostly water, similar to a tea or coffee stain on paper!

Grasping how value scales work with watercolor is really important in every type of painting but especially in landscape paintings. You can paint a tree with barely any pigment, through the misty area of the forest and show that tree covered in a fog. But if you were to paint that same tree in the same spot with more pigment, it would appear to be in front of the fog and closer to you.



Need help understanding value and consistency in pigment and water? Scan this QR code or [click here](#) and watch the video on my "Tea to Butter" exercise!





FURTHER RESOURCES!

Don't. Stop. Painting!! This is the most important part. Now that you've gone through this guide, I hope you've been filled with a burst of inspiration to keep going. Here's some more resources to get you on your way!

EVERYDAY WATERCOLOR

I have 2 books (a third on the way!) and a watercolor sketchbook. My first book, *Everyday Watercolor: 30 Paintings in 30 Days* is a GREAT place to start really unpacking everything we've covered in this ebook in greater detail with something more tangible. You get 30 step-by-step instructional paintings to follow. Check out the list of my books and all of the links to where they're sold [HERE](http://jennarainey.com/books) (jennarainey.com/books)!

JOIN MY PATREON!

My Youtube Channel is great and has HUNDREDS of amazing (and FREE!)tutorials on watercolor and art things, but if you want a liiiiittle more hand-holding and some community, then [my Patreon is where it's at.](https://www.patreon.com/jennarainey) ([jennarainey.com/joincommunity](https://www.patreon.com/jennarainey))

THE ART WITHIN

This course is my baby, my pride and joy and basically this e-book on STEROIDS. Picture going to art school and learning all the things and more, but not paying for art school tuition. It covers sketching, dimension, shading, basic shapes, brush techniques, perspective, composition, and helps you unlock YOUR artistic style to create your best work using science-backed tools for getting you into *flow state*. [Check it out here](https://jennarainey.com/the-art-within) or go to jennarainey.com/the-art-within.