

*The Beginner's Guide to*  
WATERCOLOR  
SUPPLIES

by Makoccino



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The logo for Makoccino, featuring the brand name in a brown, cursive script font.

# welcome



Buying watercolor supplies can be super overwhelming, right? There are soo many brands and all at different price points. While you don't need a lot to start out with, the supplies you choose to buy can make the difference between you loving watercolors and you being discouraged by them.

Because every artist has their own preferences and might recommend different things, I first want to give you a quick overview of the things I wish I knew sooner about watercolor supplies because they would've saved me sooo much trouble!

To set you up for success we'll cover watercolor paint, paper and brushes so you know exactly what you'll need and what to look out for when buying new watercolor supplies.

All these things will be the foundation of everything you'll need to know to make an informed decision when choosing your watercolor supplies!

Because after all, you want to become a master of your art supplies - and not be their victim! ;)

Let's dive in!

*Mako*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 06 What you need to know about Watercolor Paint

Difference in Quality, Pans vs Tubes, Color Theory

## 14 What you need to know about Watercolor Paper

The Importance of Watercolor Paper, The Ingredients, The Different Types of Surface

## 22 What you need to know about Watercolor Brushes

Their Differences, Round Brush, Flat Brush

## 29 Watercolor Supplies Cheat Sheet

An Overview of my current Favorites



“

I paint my own reality.  
The only thing I know is  
that I paint because I  
need to, and I paint  
whatever passes through  
my head without any  
other consideration.

Frida Kahlo



# 01 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WATERCOLOR PAINT

The first thing you probably want to buy is watercolors.

But there are sooo many different brands, colors and sets to choose from, right?

Watercolor beginners are usually confused when it comes to picking the right paint for them. So in the end they buy the first thing that says watercolors on the label.

I totally get it. This was me too!

Because not everything that's called watercolors is the same, I want to give you some guidance that'll help you to really understand what the differences are and what you should look for. So the next time you go to buy watercolors, you can make an informed decision!

# Differences in the Quality

Watercolors are made from pigments, binders and different additives.

The amount and quality of these ingredients define the quality of the watercolors.

Super cheap watercolors usually have a lot more fillers than actual pigments. Those fillers are used to stretch the amount of paint. This is why cheap watercolors can look a lot more opaque and chalky.

So if you really want to learn how to paint with watercolors and use its full potential, I'd rather invest in some higher quality watercolor paint.

The thing is: you don't have to go for the most expensive watercolors!

You can already invest just slightly more to upgrade from the chalky cheap paints that are made for small children to higher quality brands that'll make your life easier and your watercolor painting experience so much better.

**And this is why:** Well known brands such as Winsor & Newton, Schmincke, Sennelier and others for example, usually carry two versions of their paints: **the student and the artist grade.**



One of the main differences between those are the type and the amount of pigments they're using.

In general, the more pigments and the less fillers are used in the paint, the more transparent and vibrant colors can be.

But some pigments are rare and difficult to get, so they're a lot more expensive. That's why you usually don't find them in student grade watercolors. Instead they're replaced with synthetic pigments. Those can be less vibrant compared to the pigments that are derived from nature.



## PANS VS. TUBES

You can find watercolors typically in pans and in tubes.

### PANS

- Pans are great for beginners because they're compact and easy to use
- They come with a mixing palette and you only use as much paint as you need

### TUBES

- With tubes it's more difficult to decide how much paint you'll actually need
- Some beginners tend to use them like acrylic paint and waste too much of the precious paint
- And if you buy a set without a mixing palette, you'll need to buy it extra
- But compared to the pans, paint in tube is easier to keep clean and they're great for larger paintings because you can mix a lot more paint much quicker



If you get more comfortable with watercolors, you can always upgrade to watercolors in tubes. They are usually more economical in the long run because you get a lot more paint compared to the pans.



# WHAT COLORS DO I NEED?

Before we talk about what colors you'll need, I wanted to give you a quick overview of the **color theory that I WISH I knew sooner!!**

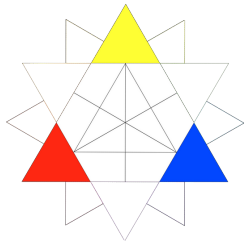
If you look at some of the watercolor sets, you'll notice that they usually have three main colors, red, yellow and blue, in two different versions.

And I'll explain why that is in just a second!

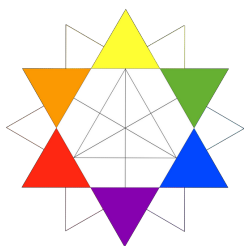


# Quick Color Theory Overview

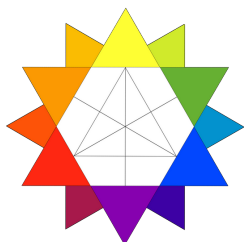
Now in theory you can mix every color from the **three primary colors**. But since a lot of people are still confused about the different systems of CMYK (Cyan, magenta, yellow, black) and RYB (red, yellow, blue) I like to rather call them the **family of the primary colors**, because it includes everyone and it's less confusing!



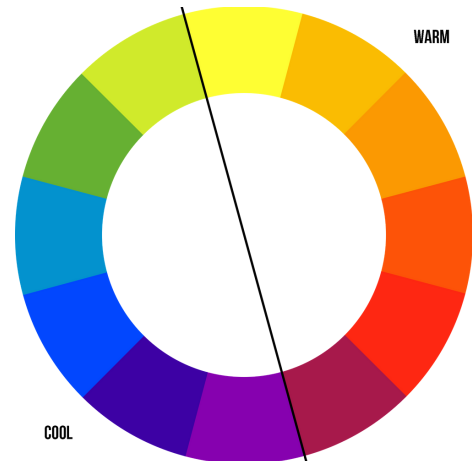
So with any member of each family you can mix the **secondary colors: orange, green and purple**. If you mix all these three colors together, you'll get a brownish/grayish color because they neutralize each other.



And if you mix the primary color, with the secondary color, you'll get the **tertiary colors**.



At the same time this color wheel can be divided into cool and warm colors.



The colors that are next to each other are called **analogous colors**. They create a color harmony that can look really beautiful when they're used in the painting.

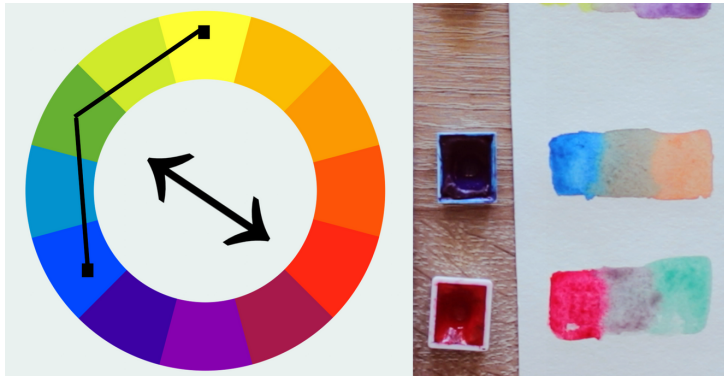
Another important fact to keep in mind is that the colors that are on opposite sides of each other on the color wheel are called **complementary colors**.

Which means if you paint them next to each other, they'll make each other look more vibrant and intense - hence compliment each other!



However, if you mix the complimentary colors together, you will get grayish and really muddy brown colors because they neutralize each other.

This happens because one of the colors that's always on the opposite side is made with the other two primary colors.



And because this way you mix three primary colors together, you get a brownish/grayish color in the end as well.

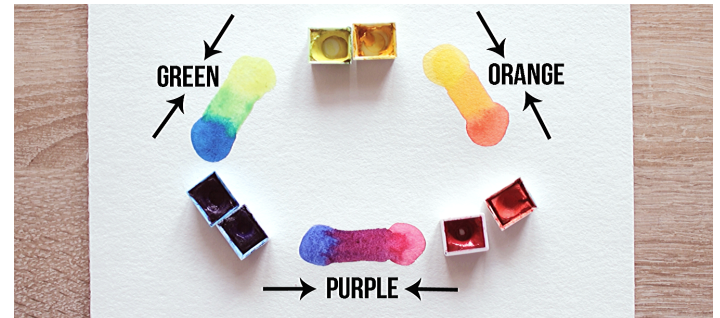
And that's why watercolor sets usually come with **two different versions of each color**. Because this can also happen by mixing **two primary colors**. You might wonder, how's this possible?

When I first started out, I was always so confused why my purples or greens always looked either muddy or sometimes perfectly bright because I blindly dipped my brush into any of the reds and blues. Until I found out why that happens.

Because depending on which type of red, yellow and blue color you use to mix the secondary colors, you get a different result.

If you look at the primary colors more closely, you'll notice that one of them always leans towards a specific secondary color.

Here's a quick overview of what colors you can create by mixing the cool and the warm primary colors. The cool primary colors are the ones that lean more towards the cool colors such as green and blue. Warm primary colors are the ones that lean more towards red and orange.



So if you want to create a very vibrant secondary color, you need to mix two primary colors that want to mix the same secondary color! For a more muted/duller version, choose primary colors that lean towards a different secondary color. So instead of using a cool red and a cool blue color that want to create purple, you can choose a warm red and a warm blue color that actually want to create orange and green, not purple. For a more in depth explanation check out the link in the resource section!



Knowing this about your watercolors will give you so much control over your colors mixtures! This will also help you decide on what additional colors to get in the future once you're more comfortable with that.

# Let's Recap!

If you've decided to take watercolor painting more seriously, I would encourage you to invest a little bit more in your watercolor paints.

It's true that an artist can create anything even with bad art supplies, but until he can do that, he still needs to learn how to use the right tools and techniques to master them first.

I get so many messages from people saying how happy they are that they invested in good art supplies.

Now they can finally have fun painting and learning without being constantly frustrated. And they also have finally discovered what they're actually capable of!

You only need a small set of good watercolors that gives you the option to mix lots of different colors.

It's tempting to buy a set with 50 different colors that is cheaper than a small set with 12 paints.

But I feel like this will only make you feel too overwhelmed with what colors you should choose and mix together! And the quality of the paint might be not that great either!

I personally started with a set of student grade watercolors in pans.

If you feel ready to upgrade to the artist grade, you can always do that!

Having a small set with quality paint will be so much more fun to use. And it'll be so much easier for you to learn how to paint with watercolors in a short amount of time!

## RESOURCES

(Click on any headline to learn more)

[WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WATERCOLOR, GOUACHE & ACRYLIC PAINT](#)

[HOW TO AVOID MUDDY COLORS](#)

Color Mixing Secrets Demystified for Beginners

[WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PANS, TUBES & LIQUID WATERCOLORS](#)

[WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WATERCOLOR PENCILS, MARKERS & STICKS](#)

“

Today, you have the opportunity to transcend from a disempowered mindset of existence to an empowered reality of purpose-driven living.

Today is a new day that has been handed to you for shaping. You have the tools, now get out there and create a masterpiece.

Steve Maraboli



# 02 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WATERCOLOR PAPER

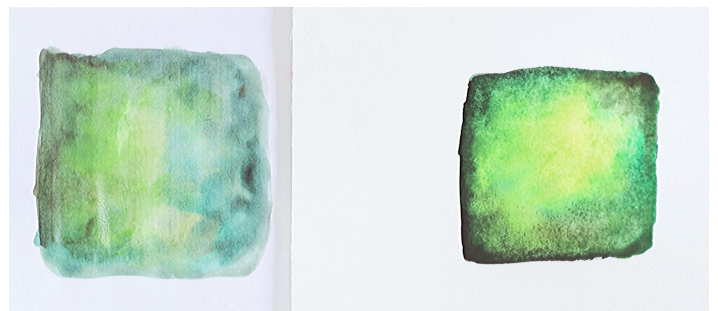
Now let's talk about watercolor paper!

If you're like me, you might have grabbed any paper that said something about watercolors on the label when you first started.

Or if you haven't, you might still be wondering if you can't just use any other regular paper instead? The answer is: you absolutely need watercolor paper for your watercolors, if you want to have the best experience and results while developing your new skill!

If you use regular paper that is made for drawing for example, the colors will look dull, won't move around beautifully, and the paper will buckle and eventually break.

## Printer Paper vs Watercolor Paper



Same Watercolor Set

# THE IMPORTANCE OF WATERCOLOR PAPER

Watercolor paper is THE most important watercolor supply.

If you think about it, it's the foundation for your painting. You can use the best watercolors in the world, but they will look bad on the wrong paper.

BUT if you use cheaper watercolors, they will look 100x better on higher quality watercolor paper.

To understand why watercolor paper is so important, I wanted to give you a quick overview on things to keep in mind while buying watercolor paper and why.

## Same Watercolor Set



## Different Paper Quality

## THE PAPER WEIGHT

One of the differences to regular printer or drawing paper is the paper weight.

It's not an instant indicator of quality because light and heavy paper come in different qualities, but it's still very important because heavy paper can absorb and hold a lot more water without buckling instantly compared to regular paper.

You can find watercolor paper between 90 - 400 lbs (190 - 640 gsm) or even higher. The heavier the paper the more water it can hold without buckling.







100% Cotton Paper



## FIBERS

But how the paper behaves also depends on what the paper is made of.

Paper can be made out of different materials such as **wood, cotton and other materials**.

**Paper that's made out of wood fiber is usually cheaper but it also has lots of downsides.**

It's naturally more fragile and can easily tear due to the fiber's structure. Which means that if you paint for too long on the paper or go over the paper with your brush way too many times, the fibers of the paper can loosen and start to peel off. It also won't allow the water to flow properly, it can create streaky and blotchy painting results, and it can discolor with age and become brittle. And some watercolor painting techniques are hard to achieve or simply impossible.

**Paper that's made out of 100% cotton is considered as the best quality paper.**

Cotton is stronger and more durable due to the structure of the fibers and this means it's a lot more difficult to overwork the paper compared to wood pulp paper.

The paper can handle different amounts of water and drying stages at the same time, so you can achieve evenly dried layers of paint without any unwanted blotches.

Another side note here is that you also want to look for paper that is acid free because the paper will last you a lot longer without aging over time.

## SIZING

Apart from the fiber, another important indicator of the quality of the watercolor paper is sizing. Sizing is added to paper, either internally or externally, to prevent mediums from absorbing into the paper fibers, causing bleeding and feathering.

When watercolor paper is produced it's traditionally sized with a coating of gelatin, starch or other synthetic materials which improves the surface strength and water resistance.

The goal of the sizing is to keep the paint on the surface of the paper and let it slowly dry there instead of just being absorbed into the paper making the colors look dull.

Instead this glue allows the wet paint to slowly seep into the fibers creating vibrant and even colors.

If there were no sizing on the paper, the watercolors would be absorbed by the paper like a paper towel.

Which usually happens when you use regular paper that is not meant for watercolors.

Sizing also allows you to lift off the paint without staining the paper, so you can easily fix certain areas in your paintings, and it also makes the paper even more durable.



# Different Type of Surface

But since watercolor paper comes in different textures, which type should you go for and what's actually the difference?

Watercolor paper comes in three different textures. You can get watercolor paper as cold-pressed, hot-pressed and rough.

## COLD-PRESSED PAPER

Cold-pressed paper is one of the most popular papers because it's so versatile.

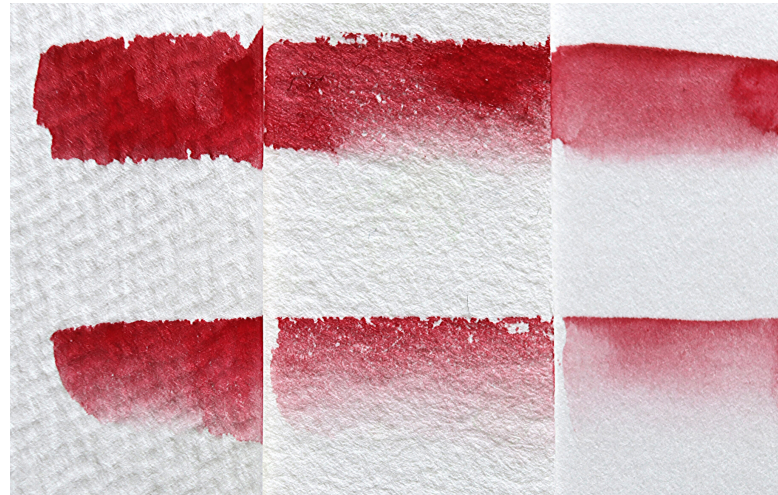
It's made by pressing through cold metal rollers. It has a little bit of texture that's also called tooth that can give your painting a nice texture.

It's also great for wet-in-wet techniques because the little dimples will hold the water and give you more time to paint.

## HOT-PRESSED PAPER

Hot-pressed paper on the other hand is pressed between two hot metal rollers making the surface super flat and smooth as with an iron.

It's great for detailed and delicate artworks because there's no paper texture that could make the lines look fuzzy. But because it's so smooth, it dries a lot quicker compared to the cold-pressed paper. That's why it isn't that great for techniques where you want to use a lot of water.



Rough

Cold-Pressed

Hot-Pressed

## ROUGH PAPER

This type of paper has a very heavy texture and because of that it can hold a lot of water.

But due to the heavy texture it's not that suitable for delicate paintings, but you can use it for more abstract art or if you want to add even more texture to your painting.

## FORM

You can get most paper in different sizes and packages such as pad, blocks, loose sheets, sketchbooks and other types. Most common way to buy watercolor paper is in blocks or pads. Blocks are a little bit more expensive than pads, but it still saves you a lot of trouble while painting because the paper won't buckle because all four sides - except for a little area - are glued together.

If you want to save money, you can get loose sheets that are usually a lot more economical because you get a big sheet of paper that you can just cut to any size you want. This type of paper tends to have even better quality because they are more durable due to the way they are produced.

# Let's Recap!

When it comes to watercolor paper, the weight, the material it's made of and the glue that holds everything together is important.

If you want to get the best painting results and experience, I would go for watercolor paper that's at least 300gsm and made out of 100% cotton.

You can also find paper made with 50% cotton, which is a little bit cheaper, but it still won't get you the same results.

As I said earlier, I would rather invest in good quality watercolor paper to have a fun and fulfilling experience than buying cheap paper that makes me want to give up and quit on my art!

That being said, if you JUST want to play around, practice some brush strokes, color mixing and other things, you absolutely don't need super high quality watercolor paper.

You can get yourself paper for practice and another set for the actual paintings.

There's always the option of buying a big sheet of high quality watercolor paper, that you can cut to size.

This is a much cheaper alternative and you can test what paper you like the best before committing to a whole block or pad of watercolor paper!

## RESOURCES

(Click on any headline to learn more)

### WATERCOLOR PAPER 101

What Is The Best Watercolor Paper? Improve Your Watercolor Painting

### WATERCOLOR STRUGGLES

10 Things I Wish I Knew SOONER!

“

You can only generate ideas when you put pencil to paper, brush to canvas... when you actually do something physical.

Twyla Tharp



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WATERCOLOR BRUSHES

Now the watercolor brush is the 3rd tool that ties everything together!

But choosing the right watercolor brush can be super confusing, right?

There are so many different brands, sizes, materials, that it's way too overwhelming. You either get a huge set of brushes where you don't know what half of those is good for.

Or you get only one brush that only makes you frustrated.

Even though there are so many different brushes, don't feel like you absolutely need everything.

Every artist has their own preferences. Some artists like to use several brushes, some artists only have one. And that's totally okay!

Don't worry, with the simple tips I'm about to share with you, you will know exactly what you'll need so you can start painting right away!



## DIFFERENCE TO OTHER BRUSHES

One of the main differences between watercolor and acrylic or oil paint brushes are the bristles.

Watercolor brushes have softer and more delicate bristles which are a lot easier to destroy when you use them with the wrong type of paint.

A watercolor brush basically acts like a sponge that soaks up water and paint while releasing it slowly onto the paper.



## DIFFERENT SHAPES

Even though watercolor brushes are sold in so many different shapes and forms, it doesn't mean you need everything!

That's why I want to focus only on the most common brushes that are great for beginners.

If you're curious about some other types of brushes, you can check out the link in the resource section below!



Now the most common watercolor brushes can be divided into **two different categories**:

- Round brush
- Flat brush

They're called round or flat brushes because they have either a round or a flat ferrule.

# The Round Brush

The bristles of the round brush have a fine point and are usually fuller at the belly, which helps to store a good amount of water.

A round brush allows you to paint in a variety of stroke widths - from super thin to broad. And you can also use it to fill in big areas with paint and water, making it a very versatile brush.

The round brush also comes in different sizes. It can be small and large. The small round brush is great for narrow lines and dots because it has a really fine tip, but it can only hold a little bit of water.

The super big version of a round brush is usually called a mop brush.

They hold a lot more water and paint which makes them great for applying a lot of paint and water to the paper.



The main difference to a regular round brush is that they usually have a bigger belly and not necessarily need to have a super fine tip as the main purpose of a mop brush is to fill a large area with paint or water.





# The Flat Brush

Compared to round brushes, flat brushes have a flat ferrule and flat bristles.

They are not only great for straight thin lines, large broad strokes and details, but they are also great for covering large areas with paint or water.

You can also find them in various different sizes and shapes



## WHAT BRUSH DO I NEED?

When you first start out or if you want to upgrade to higher quality brushes, you probably want to get the most out of your money, right?

That's why choosing a brush that's super versatile is key!

Some artists that only work with one brush use a round brush with a very fine tip that they can use for multiple things: to apply paint and water, to create thick AND thin strokes for details.

That's why a good quality brush needs to have a very sharp tip and the ability to get back into its shape.

Cheap watercolor brushes often have bristles with random hair standing out, they lose hair and the whole brush might even fall apart!

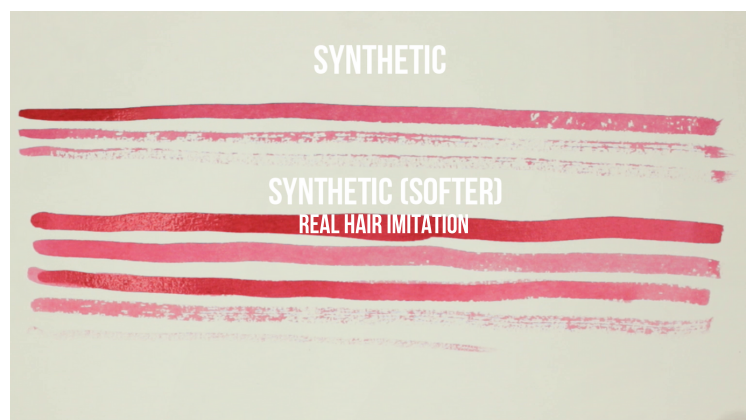


A good quality brush also needs to hold a good amount of water and paint so you don't have to stop and to load up your brush with paint after very short brush stroke. Watercolor brushes with natural hair tend to hold more water compared to synthetic hair.

Synthetic hair usually has a very smooth surface. Compared to that natural hair has a texture, similar to scales, where it can collect and hold the water.

But these types of brushes are not only more expensive and need a lot more love and care, but they're also not cruelty-free.

If this is something that's important to you, there are a lot of different options! Nowadays brands release more and more watercolor brushes with hair that imitate the real hair. The bristles are synthetic but because of their texture that is similar to real hair, they can absorb and hold a lot more water compared to regular synthetic brushes.



You can identify these brushes, if they say something about the imitation of a certain animal's hair.

# Let's Recap!

You don't have to get the most expensive watercolor brush with natural hair to have the best experience!

You only need to invest in one or two good brushes that can hold a good amount of water and that are super versatile!

For details and covering big areas with paint, you can go for a regular round brush with a fine tip.

The brush size can be different depending on the brand and the series within the brand. So I don't want to generalize here too much! But you should aim for a size 6 or 8, they are usually about the same size among the brands.

You might find similar brushes with a smaller number, but that's only within one specific series.

I've been enjoying using my casaneo brush by da vinci. It's a number 2 but is as big as the regular number 6 brushes for example! The bristles are an imitation of natural hair, so they can hold so much water and paint!

If you notice that it takes too long for you to cover the whole page with water, you can always buy an additional flat brush that is bigger!

A flat brush can always come in handy, especially when you get familiar with watercolor techniques that require sharp edges or steady brush strokes!

## RESOURCES

(Click on any headline to learn more)

### WATERCOLOR BRUSHES 101

Different Types Of WATERCOLOR BRUSHES, Their  
Uses & How To Choose Them

A photograph of watercolor supplies on a wooden surface. In the upper left, a white palette holds several pans of yellow and blue pigments. In the lower left, two brushes with gold ferrules and wooden handles are visible. In the lower right, a clear plastic palette contains pans of red and yellow pigments. A white sheet of paper is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

LIST OF MY  
CURRENT  
FAVORITE  
WATERCOLOR  
SUPPLIES

August 2019

# WATERCOLOR SUPPLIES CHEAT SHEET

With this list I wanted to give you an overview of the basic supplies that'll help you to get started or upgrade your current tools!

There are a lot of watercolor supplies that might not be in this list, but you'll find some of my favorites compared to each other, so you can compare the costs that work for your budget. Of course there are a lot of other watercolor supplies out there that might not be in the list, but I still hope this will give you an ideas! I will keep updating the list, once I discover something new!

**Click on any of these art supplies and you'll be redirected to the online shops!**

	Low	Mid	High
PAINT	<p><b>Winsor &amp; Newton Cotman</b> Sketchers Pocket Box Set 12 Half Pans \$14.96</p>	<p><b>Schmincke Akademie</b> 12 Half Pans Metal Set £35.80</p>	<p><b>Daniel Smith</b> Essential Set 5ML Tubes of 6 \$37.71</p> <p><b>Schmincke Horadam</b> 12 Half Pans Metal Set \$66.91</p> <p><b>Winsor &amp; Newton Professional</b> Sets</p>
PAPER	<p><b>Hahnemühle Britannia</b> (Block) 12 Sheets 300gsm - Cold Pressed 9.4X12.6IN : 24X32CM \$11.56</p> <p><b>Arches (Single Sheet)</b> 300 gsm - Cold Pressed 22X30IN : 56X76CM \$5.88</p> <p>100% Cotton</p>	<p><b>Hahnemühle Expression</b> (Block) 20 Sheets 300gsm - Cold Pressed 9.4x11.8IN : 24x30CM £23.59 / €22.82 100% Cotton</p> <p><b>STONEHENGE (Block)</b> 15 Sheets 300 gsm - Cold Pressed 7X10IN : 17.78X25.40CM \$17.40</p> <p>100% Cotton</p>	<p><b>Arches (Block)</b> 20 Sheets 300gsm - Cold Pressed -12X9IN \$30.41</p> <p>100% Cotton</p> <p><b>Winsor &amp; Newton Professional</b> 20 Sheets 300gsm - Cold Pressed - 7X10IN \$29.81</p> <p>100% Cotton</p>
BRUSHES	<p><b>PRINCETON : NEPTUNE</b> Faux Squirrel Size 8 \$9.25</p>	<p><b>SILVER BRUSH : BLACK VELVET</b> Blend of Natural &amp; Synthetic Hair Size 6 - 8 \$14.60</p>	<p><b>DA VINCI : CASANEO</b> Synthetic Imitation Series 498 Size 0 - 2 \$15.61</p>

All prices are from August 2019

All the links here are affiliate links. This means with every purchase through this link I get a small commission that would support me to fund future supplies for testing.



I really hope this guide was helpful!  
Now have fun painting and learning!

*Thank You!*

## WANT MORE GREAT CONTENT?

What is your NUMBER ONE question about watercolors? If you have any questions about watercolor paint, paper, brushes or any specific techniques, let me know by clicking on the button right below and I'll give my best to help you out!

[CLICK HERE](#)

