



REBEL
unicorn
CRAFTS

WATERCOLOR SUPPLY GUIDE

My thoughts and advice for the best beginner
watercolor supplies
(Brushes, Paint, Paper, and Tape)



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

I get questions all the time about what supplies I recommend to beginners, and this is a tricky question to answer. There are several reasons why it's tricky and I'd like to explain so that you understand my recommendations and caveats. This guide is focused on the basics: brushes, paint, paper, and tape.

WHY IS IT A TRICKY QUESTION?

There are a few reasons for this, let's talk about them.

Budget

The first is that budget is very individual and the most important thing to consider. I in no way ever want you to feel like just because you can't afford the recommended supplies you won't be able to paint. If there is something in this guide that's out of your budget, that's OK, use what you have or what you can afford; you can still paint!

Location/Availability

I am in the unique position of having a very international art community. Supply availability is going to vary widely by location and I am not familiar with every option available worldwide. Unfortunately, I cannot currently accommodate international shipping.

Bias

Bias is a two-fold thing here. One, there are supplies that I just like because I like them, and not everyone is going to have the same opinion. The second part is that I do sell supplies that I think are well suited to beginners. However, this is first and foremost a community based on learning and I don't want you to feel like you are obligated to purchase from me to participate in this community.

**THE BOTTOM LINE IS, I WANT TO
ENCOURAGE YOU TO PAINT, NO
MATTER THE SUPPLIES YOU HAVE!**



BRUSHES

One of the beautiful things about watercolor is that you don't need a ton of brushes! As a matter of fact if you have one good one, you're pretty much set!

Round Brushes

Usually when I am painting I will use a single brush for an entire painting and most commonly that is a size 12 round brush with synthetic bristles.

Let's talk a little more about this. To be able to get the most out of a single brush you need it to be big enough to hold enough water for bigger jobs, but have a nice point to still handle the fine details. So you want to look for one that is a size 8, 10, or 12. Brush sizes do vary slightly from brand to brand. I recommend a round brush with synthetic bristles to beginners because they move nicely, but they have a little more springiness that makes them less floppy and a little easier to control. Besides synthetic bristles, watercolor brushes can come in a variety of natural hairs. These materials tend to have more movement and less control.

My favorite is the one I had designed that I call the wONEderbrush, because you only need one! It's available on [my website](#) for \$7.50.

Here are some other options I have tested that work well. (Amazon links are affiliate links where I earn a small commission):

- [Princeton Synthetic Sable Watercolor Brush Size 10 - About \\$12](#)
- [Blick Academic Synthetic Golden Taklon Brushes Size 12 - About \\$6](#)



"Round" Brushes with less control

I recommend starting with a synthetic bristle brush when you get started because it gives the best balance of movement and control.

However, often after you've painted for a while you want less control in your brush and more movement. That's when you might want to explore other round brush options. Not only that, but these brushes are more expensive than synthetic round brushes, so it's worth practicing a bit before investing.

The first option is something like the Silver Brush. This brush has a mixture of synthetic and squirrel hair. It also has a slightly different shape to the tip. It moves more freely and has less control, but still comes to a nice point and holds lots of water.

You can find this at most specialty art supply stores or through [Amazon \(affiliate link\) for about \\$23.](#)

Quill Brushes

I put round in quotes above because a quill brush is much the same as a round brush, however due to the way the bristles are configured it works more like a mop and the shape is a bit different. This results in it being able to hold more water and also has a more floppy feeling leaving you with a little less control. And I am currently having a love affair with them!

The other main difference here is the sizing. These go from a size 0-8 and a size 2 or 4 would be most comparable to a size 10 or 12 in a traditional round brush.

The one pictured here is one I had developed and I am [selling in my shop.](#)

Here are a few other options, any links to Amazon are affiliate links:

- [Raphael SoftAqua Synthetic Squirrel Quill Brush Size 4 about \\$21](#)
- [Princeton Artist Brush Neptune Quill Size 6 About \\$23](#)



OTHER FUN BRUSHES



As I said above you can paint almost anything with just one brush, however sometimes specialty brushes can help you get the job done faster, or it's just fun to have options. Below are other types of brushes I might buy and why I'd buy them. I don't have a ton of options for these since I don't use them often, so I only have one type of each for watercolor and they do the job. If you find something similar they will work for you! Any Amazon links below are affiliate links where I earn a small commission if you purchase the item.

Flat Wash Brush

A 2 inch flat wash brush can help you speed up wetting an entire page, or with creating a flat wash. These brushes don't need to be super special, because you'll likely only use them occasionally and as long as it has soft bristles and is wide, they work great! The one I have I can no longer find online but a similar set of brushes for about [\\$6 is Royal Brush Golden Taklon Paint Brushes.](#)



Mop Brush

If you want the ultimate water and color dispenser, a mop brush is perfect. It has long bristles that flow freely and it holds a ton of water! You can use this to do many of the things a flat wash brush does, just with less control. The one I have had for years I believe is by Princeton, but I can't confirm that because I left it in the water way too long and the paint has chipped off. It is similar to this [Oval Mop brush for about \\$8.](#)



Angle or Dagger Brush

There's something special about painting with a brush that has an angle, or at least there is for me. You can get straight lines, and also details. For this you can either get a simple angled brush or many watercolor artists prefer a dagger brush. The dagger is similar, but has a sharper angle, or sometimes a rounded angle to the brush.

- [Princeton 1/2 inch angle brush about \\$12](#)
- [Princeton Dagger Brush 1/4 inch about \\$7](#)





PAINT

This is where it can get really tricky with recommendations mainly due to the wide variety of price points. A set of very basic watercolors like Crayola or Prang can be under \$10 or you can end up purchasing top of the line tubes of Daniel Smith for about \$10 per single color. This list is far from exhaustive and there are a lot of good options out there. If you don't see your paint on this list, it doesn't mean it's bad, it just means it's either not my preference, or I haven't tried it. I have tried over 25 different types of watercolors, but that just is scratching the surface of what's available.

Pans vs. Tubes

Every artist will have their own preferences when it comes to tubes vs pans and there's not a right answer. That being said, when beginners are looking for budget art supplies there is a wider variety of options in pan paints and I find at that they are generally a better quality than the budget tube options.



In my very biased opinion, I love my set of Unicorn Food watercolors for beginners. This is a set I had manufactured specifically for beginners. It comes in a tin with 18 colors and some open slots so you can fill them up with other colors you like. Also the tin itself has lots of mixing space and mixing wells so you don't have to purchase those separately.

You can purchase this set [from my site for \\$31.](#) If you live internationally or these just aren't your jam, that's fine; we'll explore more options on the next page.



PAN PAINTS

There are so many options out there that it's overwhelming. Let's talk about my preferences for budget, mid range, and splurge worthy. Any Amazon links are affiliate links, where I earn a small commission, if you purchase.

I am defining budget is anything under \$10, mid-range will fall under \$50, and splurge worthy are over \$50.

Budget

Just because you're on a budget doesn't mean you can't paint! There are downsides to super budget paint like lack of pigment and the paints not moving quite how you want, but they can definitely get you started and you can still create some beautiful art!



My two favorite budget paints are:

- Prang - you can get a [set of 16 for about \\$10](#) or a set of [8 for about \\$3-4](#).
- [Dollar Tree has a set of watercolor for \\$5 that works pretty well, they are a little chalky, but will definitely do in a pinch!](#)

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Mid- Range

There are lots of good options in this range, but here are a couple of my recommendations.

My favorites are:

- My Unicorn Food palette that I mentioned earlier. I have it in a set of [12 for \\$21](#) and [set of 18 for \\$31](#).
- [Koi Pocket Field Set](#) these range from about \$26 on sale to around \$40 when not on sale. One thing to note is that over time the cakes become misshapen. They still work, but some people do not like how this looks.
- [Soho Urban Artist E-Z Lift Watercolors](#) for about \$27. I really like this set, it has very pigmented colors. However, the packaging can be quite tricky, and the pans are not secured well, so if you're clumsy like me and drop it, they scatter everywhere.
- [Winsor & Newton Cotman Watercolor Paint set 12 half pans](#) around \$32. I include this one mainly because I know a lot of my students really like this set. Personally, I feel like it is ...fine, there's nothing wrong with it, it's just never wowed me.



Splurge Worthy

Honestly, there aren't many splurge worthy watercolor pan sets I have tried and felt like they were worth the money. Most of my students would be better served with a mid-range set. However, my one exception is QoR; the pigmentation on these is insane and I love them!

They aren't available at as many locations, but Jerry's often has a deal on them as they can range from about [\\$60-70 for a set of 12](#).



TUBE PAINTS

You may have noticed that I don't often talk about tube paints in my videos. It's not because I dislike tube paints, in fact I love them. However, since most of my community are beginners with beginner budgets I have a hard time recommending them, because I have had lots of quality issues with budget tube paints. Often there is so much separation or lack of pigment that they aren't worth the money. Not only that but even the budget options aren't so budget friendly.

That being said tube paints are great for mixing custom colors, mixing large amounts of colors, getting lots of bright pigment, and also being able to make your own pans sets.

For this category I don't have any real recommendations for budget options, so I will be only exploring mid-range and splurge worthy.

Mid-Range

My two favorite options for mid-range tube paints are Shinhan and Artist Loft. The Shinhan are in my opinion far superior. The Artist Loft paints do have some variation in quality between the colors, some are great, and other are so-so, making them a little riskier to purchase.



Links to purchase these two types of paint (Amazon links are affiliate links):

- [Shinhan Professional Watercolor 30 tubes \\$45](#)
- [Artist Loft Tube Paints about \\$4 a tube. I'd recommend only getting a few and trying them out before getting a full set.](#)



Splurge Worthy

Unlike pans, there are lots of splurge worthy tube paints available. This is one area my knowledge does lack a little because I don't have the budget to buy lots of this expensive paint.

I do have 2 brands that I like quite a lot that are splurge worthy.

Daniel Smith



This suggestion likely comes as no surprise. Daniel Smith has long been thought of as the cream of the crop when it comes to watercolor supplies. They have a wide variety of colors and the tubes come in a couple different sizes. They range from about \$10-15 a tube.

You can find them on [Amazon \(affiliate link\)](#). But I would really recommend buying them from a local specialty art supply store because you can browse them and the stores often have more information and swatches.

QoR

QoR is Golden's answer to high end watercolor and in my opinion it shines! My absolute favorite watercolor colors are by QoR. Their phthalo blue, and quinacridone magenta are worth an investment.

You can find them on Amazon but it's not really a great place to buy them; I'd recommend going to a specialty store or [Blick](#) has a great offering of them.





HANDMADE WATERCOLORS

Again, we'll be visiting a topic which I have a bias on. I love handmade paints. I love how they are often more creamy, unique color combinations, and I love that they are often more opaque and therefore you can get almost gouache like effects if you use less water with them. Not only that, but I love making them...hence the bias.

This section won't have different budget ranges because most handmade paints of quality won't fall into a budget category because someone is handcrafting them.

I take a lot of pride in my handmade paints and I am particularly fond of my metallics, bright colors, and limited edition sets. [You can check out what I have available here!](#)



But I know I am not the only handmade paint game in town. Well, I might be in my specific town, but you know what I mean.

I have used handmade paints from a few other talented makers that I have enjoyed.

[Dreamland Watercolors](#) - She focuses on shifting metallics that are gorgeous!

[Bergette Pigments](#) - She makes gorgeous watercolors from discarded make-up as well as real earth pigments that she collects and processes!



PAPER

They say that paper makes the difference in watercolor painting, and that is no joke. The nicer the paper you have the more that watercolors will behave and the more control you'll have.

That being said super nice paper is expensive and if you're a beginner a \$40 pad of paper will be daunting and end up sitting unused for fear of messing up the precious paper.

The big difference between papers with a high price point and a lower price point is the material it's made of. Nicer more expensive papers are made of cotton, and cheaper papers are made of cellulose, or a mixture of cellulose and cotton.

I recommend beginners start with a paper that they aren't afraid to mess up on and for most budgets that means a more student grade paper or cellulose paper. Because it will be a fraction of the price that means if you mess up it will only cost you a couple cents instead of multiple dollars. As you grow in your practice I do recommend experimenting with nicer papers, but keeping more beginner practice paper on hand because not all projects need the cream of the crop and sometimes you just want to practice.

I do recommend making sure you get watercolor-specific paper. You can technically paint on any paper, however the effects won't work as well and the paper will be more prone to damage, so spending a little extra to get actual watercolor paper will pay off in the long run.

Like tube paints, my paper suggestions can really only be split into two categories: budget and splurge worthy.

THE BEST PAPER TO BUY IS THE PAPER YOU'LL USE!

Budget Friendly

There are lots of budget watercolor papers out there. Some are better than others. I do recommend trying to find one that is at least 140lb. My two favorite options for budget friendly watercolor are below.

Canson XL Watercolor Paper



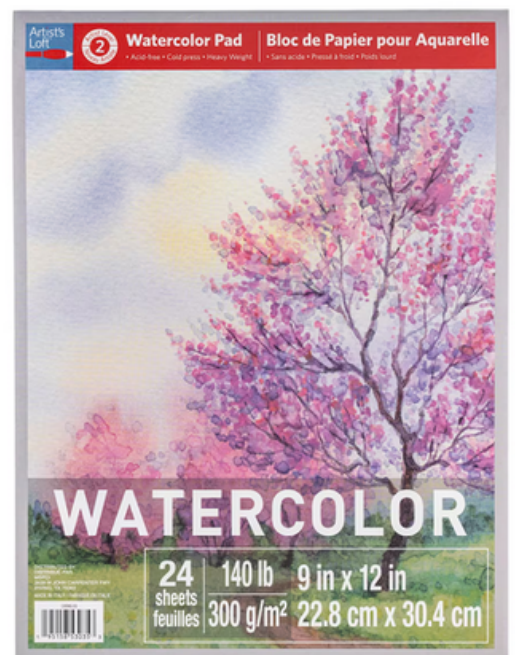
This is my go-to practice or messing around paper. It's a cold press paper that is 140 pound. It has a nice texture and I find it to be good quality. It's made of cellulose materials so like other cheaper papers it is more prone to backruns, but sometimes I like that!

This paper is about \$14 for 9x12 pad of 30 sheets. You can purchase it from [Amazon \(affiliate link\)](#). Or you can wait until your favorite craft store is having a sale to save a couple bucks!

Artists Loft

Michaels brand watercolor paper is another good budget option. It performs similarly to Canson.

This is primarily sold through [Michaels and a 9x12 pack of 24 sheets is around \\$10.](#)



Splurge Worthy

These paper options will definitely put a bigger dent in your wallet, but you will definitely notice a huge difference in the paper quality.

When I am buying nicer paper, I do prefer to buy it in block form. This means that it is glued around the edges so it stays flat without you having to tape it down!

Arches



This name probably sounds familiar because it's the favorite of most watercolor artists. This paper comes in a variety of sizes.

This paper is about \$22 for 9x12 pad of 12 sheets. You can purchase it from [Amazon \(affiliate link\)](#).

Canson Heritage

This is Canson's answer to Arches and it performs beautifully. I do love the texture of this paper.

This paper is about \$35 for a 9x12 pack of 20 sheets. You can purchase it from [Amazon \(affiliate link\)](#).



Stonehenge Aqua Coldpress

Another delightful splurge worthy paper option is Stonehenge.

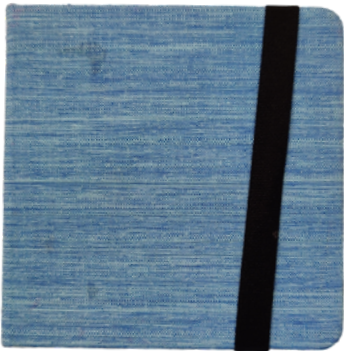
This paper is about \$23 for a 9x12 pack of 15 sheets. You can purchase it from [Amazon \(affiliate link\)](#).

BUT WHAT ABOUT SKETCHBOOKS?!?!?

I love using sketchbooks instead of individual pieces of paper, but finding a sketchbook that's suitable for watercolor can be tricky. Many sketchbooks will list watercolor as a possible use, however it might be thinner paper that can handle a little watercolor but won't be able to handle lots of it or layering.

Look specifically for sketchbooks filled with 140 lb watercolor paper. I often find that searching for a "watercolor journal" provides more results. Here are three of my favorites. (Any Amazon links are affiliate links that I earn a small commission from if you purchase.)

Rebel Unicorn Crafts Watercolor Journal



Let's kick this off on a biased note, because this one I sell.

It's an itty bitty baby sketchbook that is about 5x5 inches, it's filled with 24 sheets of 140lb cold press cotton paper.

I love the texture of this paper and the little size! [You can purchase it from my site](#) for \$16.

Other Watercolor Sketchbooks I like

I have repurchased both of these watercolor sketchbooks multiple times. they are both about 6x9 and filled with cold press 140lb watercolor paper.

- [Reflexions Watercolor Sketchbook \\$21 for 24 sheets](#)
- [Linden Art Watercolor Journal \\$18 for 32 sheets](#)





TAPE

This the is the topic I am most asked about. Tape is important, but more important than the type of tape is how you remove it.

I have tested tons of tapes and my main takeaway is that most tapes work pretty well! Some do have higher adhesion and therefore a greater chance of tearing your paper. Some offer crisper lines, but in general most tape works just fine for watercolor as long as you know how to remove it. In fact even normal clear scotch tape is fairly gentle and has nice crisp lines.

If you follow these steps it will help to reduce the risk of tearing your paper:

- 1.Wait to remove the tape until the paper is completely dry.
- 2.If you have a source of heat like a hair dryer, heat up the tape a little, it will help to release the adhesive.
- 3.Peel towards the outside, don't peel outside in.
- 4.Peel at an angle, not 90 degrees.
- 5.Go slow!

BUT WHAT TAPE DO I USE?

I use a lot of different types of tape, mainly because I have so many for testing, but they fall into 3 main categories:

- 1.Utility
- 2.Specialty
- 3.Light adhesive

Let's dive into a little more detail on the next page.

Utility



These are go to tapes that are widely available from places like Amazon or even the hardware store. Pretty much any type of masking tape or painters tape. EXCEPT FROG TAPE! DON'T USE FROG TAPE! It has a coating that soaks up water and can get on to the edges of your painting and mess it up.

All of these types work pretty well, but they don't provide perfectly crisp edges.

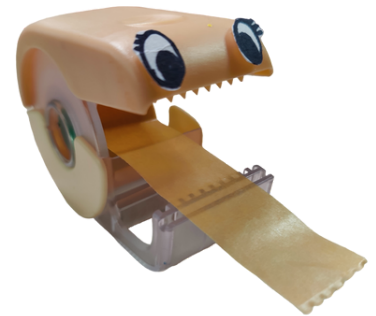
Usually I just buy the cheapest masking tape partially to save money, but also the cheaper stuff like [this pack of 9 rolls for \\$17 \(Amazon affiliate link\)](#) has lower adhesion because it's not as quality of tape.

For bigger projects or one that I want to stick down better I will reach for [painters tape, the blue stuff \(Amazon affiliate link\)](#). It's a little pricier at \$22 for 3 rolls but serves a different purpose.

Specialty

My favorite specialty tape is [Nichiban 241 tape \(about \\$4 a roll\)](#). It's gentle, has wonderfully crisp edges, and when you heat it, it kind of smells like cedar.

Plus you can get this funky little tape dispenser, eyes not included.



Light Adhesive



When I am worried about how much adhesion the tape has I always reach for cheap washi tape. It's adhesive is so light that it might even lift while you're painting. Plus, it comes in fun patterns and colors.

I'd grab something like [this pack of 21 rolls for \\$7 \(Amazon affiliate link\)](#).