

Drawing and Painting Flowers in Watercolour

Composition

Give some thought and care to this. Make sure the paper area is generously sized to accommodate the subject. Arrange the stems or plant to give the most pleasing aspect with different features showing - central or asymmetrical arrangement? Trim/prune components of the plant that are visually distracting to you. If it is a pot plant you don't want to trim, you could place a piece of white card behind the area you have selected so that you are looking only at the area you have chosen to draw.

Drawing

For a detailed drawing, use a sharp point of an HB or B pencil, propelling pencils are good. This also avoids transferring too much graphite onto the paper, muddying subsequent washes. Do some loose compositional lines first to work out the positioning, lines for the midribs of leaves, then work from central areas outwards in more detail. The more observed detailing you do at this stage the more you won't get confused by indeterminate shapes later on when painting. Pencil lines can be erased after the first washes.

Masking

It may be appropriate to mask off certain areas, stamens etc, that will be too fiddly to paint around with strong colours. If you work soap/fairy liquid onto your brush then use the masking fluid, it will protect your brushes. Rinse now and again and reapply the soap and masking fluid to start again. Or alternatively use masking brushes or a ruling pen.

Painting - follow your own style, but some general guidelines are:-

Before painting, for each stage, mix all your colour washes first. Have a choice of concentrations weak and strong - good for wet into wet and to avoid having to do too much remixing.

First Washes

Wet into wet, the lightest colours in the subject. Lift off paint for highlights, or work around them. A light wash of yellow-green over the upper surfaces of leaves will warm subsequent washes for vibrant leaves (providing the subject has strong bright green leaves.)

Mid Washes

The local colours of the subject- what is most visible to you generally. Apply wet into wet, or more refined wet onto dry. For leaves, it may work to leave the first coat alone to form the veins if the colour is appropriate, working around them with the mid wash.

Third Washes

The darkest colours as well as the shadows and remaining small details. More control is needed here. Show where leaves overlap stems, petals overlapping petals with small areas of shadow colour in these locations. This stage is where your hard work is rewarded by you being able to create a really three dimensional appearance. Work all the remaining details, such as the reproductive flower parts and edge stems.

Backgrounds

Leave white for 'botanical' studies, but soft focus grounds can 'naturalise' your subject with an atmospheric environmental feel. These can be done before painting the main subject if you are sure what you are after, however they can be done afterwards. Mix up a range of weak and strong washes, as many as you think you may need (you may not use all of them), then pre-wet areas in appropriate sections and work in the colour, wet into wet, working from the subject outwards, adding any special effects you may like e.g. salt sprinkle, water drops, spattered colour.