

# FORAGER

crafts

TIPS, TRICKS,  
& INSTRUCTIONS

WATER-  
SOLUBLE  
PASTELS





# WATER-SOLUBLE PASTELS



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## What are water-soluble oil pastels?

Water-soluble oil pastels combine the best of the traditional art medium of oil pastels, with the fun and flexibility of watercolor. They're distinct from regular oil pastels in a few key ways, but share a common history.

Classic oil pastels – also called *cray pas* – are crayon-like sticks of pigment, wax, and oil. They have a long history in fine art – both in preparatory art studies, and in finished paintings. Oil pastels were famously used by fine artists like da Vinci, Michelangelo, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Picasso, and are enjoying a renaissance of their own today in mixed-media painting.

As compared to classic oil pastels, water-soluble pastels apply more smoothly, blend more easily, and – most importantly – can be easily dissolved with water. Their water-solubility means that we can create translucent and layered effects that are remarkably similar to those from traditional hard-pan or liquid watercolor. After the watered layers have dried, one can layer additional layers of color on top – allowing for the ability to build and blend a piece that looks mixed-media – all with one versatile tool.

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## What are water-soluble oil pastels? (continued)

Classic oil pastels can be a challenging medium for a first-time painter - much like oil paint, it can be tricky to control the pigment's thickness and placement. However, we've found that water-soluble pastels - unlike their tricky cousins - are accessible for even the most beginner of painters.

Anyone who has held a crayon will find water-soluble pastels easy to hold & apply on paper, while the ability to blend them out with water or layer on additional color post-blend makes them especially forgiving of any mistakes or desired changes.

Unlike traditional oil pastels, we hope that you'll also find your set of water-soluble pastels to be easy to sharpen and maintain with time. All the items in your kit are designed to have a long life and to keep you practicing as much as you'd like.

So though you're joining a long history of fabled artists by picking up a pastel crayon, worry not! All you need to do is read through this guide & then dive right in.

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## Supplies in your kit

Each oil pastel kit includes a full set of twelve **water-soluble oil pastels**, our favorite **cold-pressed watercolor paper pad**, our favorite **cruelty-free watercolor brush**, and a **pencil** for sketching. From home, you'll also want to have a cup or two of **clean water** (we use old jam jars!) and a **napkin** or paper towel for blotting your brush.

**Cold-pressed watercolor paper** has long been our choice for any kind of beginning watercolor – including pastels, hard-pan palettes, and gouache. As the name implies, cold-pressed paper is created by pressing paper pulp or cotton through cold metal rollers – which creates the unique texture you can feel on the surface of the paper.

Cold-pressed paper differs from hot-pressed paper, which is fed through hot rollers that steam and smooth the sheet to feel very smooth to the touch. Cold-pressed paper absorbs water more readily, and allows for greater layering without tearing or damaging the surface of the paper. For that reason, beginners tend to have the most success with this paper.

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## Supplies in your kit (continued)

One thing we love about the paper pad in your kit is that each sheet has two sides – one that’s more textured, and one that’s smoother. There’s no wrong side to use! The smoother side will help capture details a more readily, while the rougher side can handle more water, and lends itself to greater build-up of color.

With the techniques we cover in the following pages, try experimenting on both sides to get a feel for what you prefer.

The **brush** in this kit is made of synthetic fibers, which we prefer to brushes containing animal hair. It’s a size four round brush - a versatile size and shape that’s easy for beginners and lends itself to many types of projects. As you continue in your pastel journey, you may add to your brush collection – but remember that you’re not limited to brushes! Your fingers make excellent blending tools, as do items like makeup sponges, cloth, foam, or rolled paper (called a *tortillon*).

Last, but not least – the humble pencil! We love this lil guy for sketching an underlayer, or for adding in texture and additional visual interest after application of the pastels.

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## Preparing your workspace

Whatever you're painting with, it's a good idea to cover your table or work surface with craft paper, newspaper, or cardboard to protect it from staining. Similarly, we wouldn't recommend wearing your brightest white outfit while working with oil pastels – it's easy to accidentally transfer color from your hands to your clothes in a moment of creative inattention.

To clean a stained surface, first scrape away any remaining pastel with something thin & flexible – like a credit card. To handle any additional staining, you can saturate a cotton ball with rubbing alcohol and blot away. For fabrics, we'd recommend the same advice, with an additional treatment of liquid dish soap if needed.

As with most things, prior preparation prevents poor performance (or pastel-y pants)! It also makes for easier cleanup when you're ready to take a break. So protect your surface, and wear an apron or clothes that you're not too attached to. And always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before returning to normal life to prevent accidental color transfer to walls, furniture, children, clothing, or pets.

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## Color theory 101

Your kit is unpacked, you've prepped your surface, and you're in your comfiest art clothes – now what?! We'll begin with a little refresher on color & color blending. You might remember the color wheel from elementary or middle school art class – the wheel that shows you complementary primary and secondary colors.

**Primary colors** include red, yellow, and blue; they can be combined to create **secondary colors**, like orange, green, and purple. And don't forget about **tertiary colors**, like red-violet or yellow-green! Those are a mix of **analogous** primary and secondary colors – which simply means they're right next to one another on the color wheel.

The color wheel



Primary colors



Secondary colors



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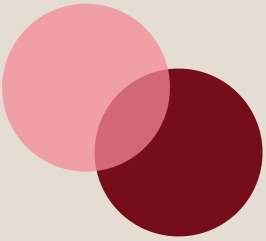


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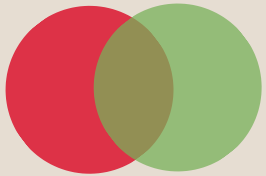
## Color theory 101 (*continued*)



**Hue:** When we describe a color in the color wheel, we're talking about the **hue**. The hue refers to the color in its pure state – neither lightened nor darkened, and undulled by any other color.



**Value:** The **value** of the color refers to the degree of lightness of a color, or hue. We can tint the color by adding white, tone it by adding gray, or shade it by adding black.



**Intensity:** Finally, we can adjust the **intensity** of the shade by mixing it with a **complementary** color – the color that is opposite to it on the color wheel.

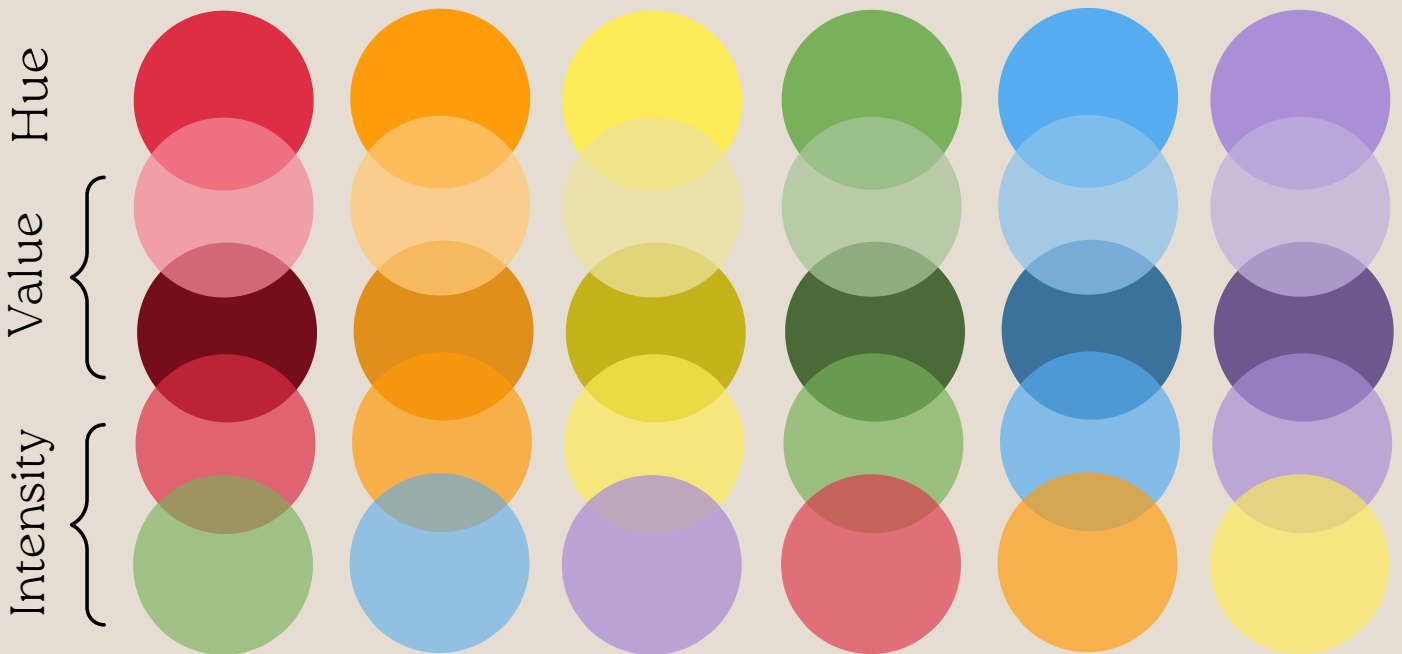
Color theory is useful to keep in mind when we're working with a blendable medium like oil pastel, and opens up our 12 base colors to reveal a nearly infinite range of potential color combinations. By layering one color over another, we can create new hues, new tones, new shades, and new tints. And that's even before adding water, and getting into the fun of using our paintbrush!

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## Color theory 101 (*continued*)

On the first page of your sketchbook, we recommend having a bit of fun with color theory. Layer colors together, and then play with value. Smudge them together with your finger for a smooth blend, or leave them as-is for a rougher effect. See which colors you like together, and perhaps take a glance around you, choose an object, and then try to color-match it using only the oil pastels in front of you. It's both easier than it sounds and something that you could spend a lifetime trying to perfect!



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## Experimenting with dry blending

In the previous section we touched upon the idea of blending using your finger to smudge two tones together. And that's all there is to it, at its most basic – just layering one color over the other, then combining them gently together on the page. That's a technique that's referred to as dry blending – blending that occurs before any water hits the page.

As you grow in this practice, you may accumulate many brands of pastels. It's a good rule of thumb when mixing pastels to be aware of their hardness. If you'd like a smooth blend, you want to make sure to use two pastels that are similarly soft for the best effect. Regardless of the tools you're using, you'll also want to make sure not to apply the pastel too heavily – we don't need to build it up on the page in order to blend it – just a gentle nudging back and forth will do the trick. You can always add more if needed! Adding one pigment on top of the other to blend is called **glazing**.

Another technique is **scumbling**, which (among other definitions) describes the process of dragging a clean brush across the top of a color to remove pigment - and thereby lighten it. Of course, we can also lighten a color by the process of glazing – you may find, however, that it's more economical to remove pigment to create lighter shades.

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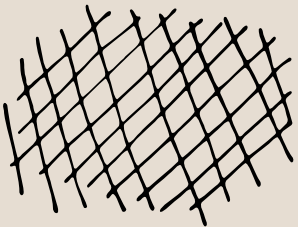
# WATER-SOLUBLE PASTELS

## Experimenting with dry blending (continued)

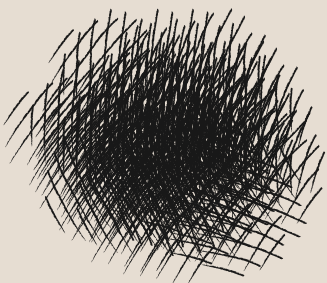
A few other types of dry blending involve mark-making with the colors we're aiming to blend. The techniques on this page allow us to combine together many shades uniformly.



**Hatching** involves creating a series of parallel lines of varied colors, then blending them with our brush or finger; depending on the number of lines and the spacing, we can achieve more complex colors, or can create shadowed or ombre effects.



**Cross-hatching** is very similar to hatching – the same lines, but with some turned at an angle, to create a woven effect - these can remain blended or unblended, depending on what you're looking for.



Last, but not least, we can experiment with **feathering** – similar to cross-hatching, but using shorter lines that overlap more completely. Like cross-hatching, you don't have to blend these in fully - unblended feathering can create a lot of depth and visual interest in a finished painting.

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## Just add water!

You're a veritable dry-blending expert – but now it's time to add water and see the other side of this versatile medium. For the experiments in this section, you can play around with the color wheel or blending from your previous sheets, or create a new page just for watery experimentation.

Or – if you're the type who'd rather just dive in – read on in this section and then simply apply these techniques to your first project.

When working with water, it's helpful to have one to two jars of clean water that you'll refresh regularly. Try reusing old plastic cups or jam jars for this – they don't need to be fancy!

It's also helpful to have clean paper towels or napkins on hand for dabbing our paper and brushes.

As we go, we want our water to remain fairly clean to avoid muddying our canvas. Typically once it starts to look like a cup of milky tea, it's time to empty the jar and refill. And yes, it's safe to wash this water down your sink!

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Just add water!  
(*continued*)

If you've used watercolors before, you might be familiar with the practice of wetting your paper before applying color – typically referred to as “Wet on Wet” or “Wet on Dry,” depending on whether the pigments have been moistened as well. This is an effect that we can recreate with our oil pastels, with a bit of preparation.

In an upper corner of the artwork – or on a separate page or palette (even a bit of cardboard can work well) – we'll apply a small amount of our pigment by rubbing the pastel in small circles. With that small circle of color, we've created a bit of softly-ground pigment that we can dip our brush in – just as we would with a watercolor palette! In fact, you can create a full palette, with multiple circles of color, or even blend together colors to create your own custom watercolor palette.

With our palette made, we can try those two techniques.

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# WATER-SOLUBLE PASTELS

## Just add water! (*continued*)

### Wet on Wet

Dip your brush in clean water and let it absorb fully. Wet a small section of the watercolor paper with clean water. Then take your brush and return it to the water, and move it to the circle of pastel that you made on your “palette.” Mix the wet brush with the paint, then dab the loaded brush onto the wet paper to see the effect. This is great for applying soft washes of color, as well as achieving that classic watercolor look.

### Dry on Wet

This time, we’ll skip the step where we wet our paper. Instead, we’ll wet our brush fully, and mix that dampened brush into the circle of pastel, swirling it around. Once our brush is loaded with damp color, we’ll apply it onto the dry paper. You’ll see immediately how different this looks – much more saturated color, with brush lines that are more clean and distinct. Try experimenting with different levels of brush saturation – if it’s just barely damp, you’ll get very clear lines; if it’s wetter, you’ll start to approach the same effect that we achieved with the “Wet-on-Wet” technique.

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## Just add water! (*continued*)

You can easily create a painting using the watercolor-inspired techniques listed above; however, part of the fun with our oil pastels is that we can sketch out our designs with them fully before applying a drop of water.

When we're applying the pastels directly to paper, you'll find the greatest success by initially applying the crayons onto **dry** paper. This will prevent unwanted color bleed, and will give you a chance to build up shapes and use the dry-blending techniques we covered in the previous section.

After you've set down a first layer of pastel, you can try using the "Wet on Dry" technique to blend, soften, or mix colors together. Let the paper dry for a bit before applying more pastels – if it's fully wet, you'll notice that the pastels barely stick to the paper at all! Especially for applying white highlights or details to a finished design, we'd recommend that you wait until the paper is fully dry (or "bone dry") before adding on additional color. That's the best way to saturate the color fully, and with the most control.

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## Sketching & designing!

Once you're feeling comfortable with the methods of dry application, wet application, and both types of blending, it's high time to dive into a full project!

We list out a couple of favorite projects in the next section, but don't feel limited to our ideas - or even feel limited to a studio! We chose the items in this kit to be portable - you can take them on a plane, pack them in a backpack, or carry them with you to the garden and paint *en plein air*. All you'll need is a source of water and the tools in your kit, and you can paint from nature.

Depending on your mood, you might want to use the pastels as you would crayons or colored pencils, sketching out your design without prior preparation. Or, if you're more of a planner, you might prefer to use the pencil in your kit, to give yourself a chance to erase and rearrange.

A lovely thing about these oil pastels is that they remain fairly translucent -so if you'd prefer to keep the pencil hidden, use light strokes for your sketch. On the other hand, very dark pencil lines or cross-hatching can look extraordinary with washes of color placed over them! It's all up to you.

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## Recommended projects

This medium lends itself well to impressions of nature - to inexact, colorful, spontaneous painting with lots of feeling. It can be used for other things as well, but for your first projects, you may want to lean into the botanical or animal world.

We love botanical studies of plants, fungi, fruits, and flowers; portraits of a beloved pet or a favorite wild animal; landscapes of mountains, forests, and oceans; or pure expressions of abstract colors and shapes. On the next two pages, you'll see examples of two types of pastel illustration - one a guide to various mushrooms, and the other an impressionist sketch of a clutch of oranges.

As you conceive of new designs, don't feel limited to oil pastels alone! The pencil in your kit can create depth over or under the pastels in your kit. You can create dark sketches below the color, or cut the sharp tip of the pencil through layers of pastel to create texture and shape. Similarly, you can use multi-media tools like paint pens to add details or highlights, or even work in a bit of collage (painting around a photo; or adding real pressed flowers into a pastel landscape with a dab of glue). The point is - don't feel constrained! This is an open medium that plays well with others.

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## The care and keeping of your kit

### Finishing your projects

Something to keep in mind as you work is that water-soluble pastels will never fully dry, which means that every project can be ongoing until you apply a sealant, frame it, or give it away. This offers a lot of room for meditative painting. As you go, give yourself breaks; take a walk away from your painting, or set it aside for a week or two. When you come back, the oil pastels will be just as pliable as before - ready for you to continue working.

*(Speaking of sealants, Sennelier D'Artigny Oil Pastel Fixative is our favorite on the market)*

### Sharpening your pastels

You'll find as you continue working that your pastels will dull from the pointed tip that they ship with. A way to slow this process is by making sure to use all sides of the point equally as you go. When you feel ready to sharpen your pastels, there are two methods - one, using a razor blade to shave off the edges gently (be careful!) Two, by rubbing the top edge of the pastel against paper or cardboard, turning as you go, to slowly to restore the shape of the tip. With either method, make sure not to waste that precious pastel! Save the scrapings and use them as you would watercolor paints.

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## Conclusion & contact information

And that's all there is to it! At least all there is for getting started. Keep practicing and experimenting, and you'll be amazed at the things you'll create.

For more information, troubleshooting, or any questions about sourcing or materials, please get in touch using any of the methods below - and feel free to tag us on Instagram - we'd love to feature your artwork!

**We can't wait to see what you create!**



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