

# SUSIE'S TIPS FOR CLEANING WATERCOLOR BRUSHES

When it comes to watercolor supplies and materials your watercolor brushes can be an expensive investment. It doesn't matter if you are painting with the finest Kolinsky red sable or the less expensive synthetic filament brushes you still need to take care of your brushes to get the most out of your investment and time.

It's easy to just rinse our brushes in water at the end of a painting session and think that's good enough. It's not like painting in oils or acrylic where you can ruin a good brush if the paint and binder is left to dry in the brush.

Watercolors are more forgiving, but pigments and binders will build up in the brush over a period of time if not cleaned properly.

When it comes to cleaning your watercolor brushes there are several recommended procedures used by different artists that will work. Their advice is based on what works best for their painting style and how often they use their brushes. These are my suggestions based on my own experience. Quick and easy works best for me. ☺

At the end of a painting session I thoroughly rinse each of the brushes I've used. If I'm going to be continuing my painting within the next 24/48 hours I confess I don't always wash every brush with soap. I do wash brushes used with staining pigments after each use. If you paint several times during the week, weekly cleaning will probably be sufficient.

## Cleaning Watercolor Brushes

I like to use old fashioned Ivory bar soap. But you can use glycerin bar soap, vegetable soap, or mild shampoo that is organic in nature and doesn't contain lotions. Baby shampoo is a good choice. There are also some excellent commercial brush cleaners available. By the way- these work for both natural and synthetic brushes.

### Here's how – step by step

1. Gather up your dirty brushes and bring them to your sink.
2. Fill a large bowl or jar with warm water. I used to leave the tap running but I'm trying to be more conservative and eco-friendly these days. Wet them all with warm water, select one and set the other aside while you wash each brush one at a time. (Don't leave them sitting in water.)
3. Wet the brush again and with an open palm under running water, gently swirl the brush in your palm until the water runs clean. Turn the water off.
4. Moisten a bar of Ivory soap, in a gentle circular motion work some soap into your wet brush.
5. Make a lather by repeating the swirling motion with the soap filled brush against your palm.
6. Rinse/repeat/rinse/repeat until the lather stays white and the brush is clean.
7. Set this brush aside and start cleaning the next brush.
8. When you have completed this cycle for all of your brushes do a final rinse to remove all the residual soap under a moderate stream of warm running water. If a brush feels slick or slimy when you rub the hairs between your thumb and forefinger it still may have some soap in it.
9. Shake or dab the excess water out of each brush using a dry towel. Slinging larger brushes with a quick snap of the wrist will also help remove moisture and promote drying. I don't recommend slapping your watercolor brushes on the side of the sink to remove excess water. Be gentle- a little TLC is recommended.
10. Reshape each damp brush to its original shape with your fingers. If a brush is a little wild and wiry you may need to moisten it a little and try shaping it again. Your saliva (or spit) makes a good mousse to tame some of those wild hairs. Spit into your palm then pick up some of the saliva by rolling your brush through it then reshape the point with your fingers.
11. Allow your brushes to air dry on a flat surface such as a dry hand towel or a couple of layers of paper towels. Never dry your watercolor brushes in a jar with the tips pointing up. The moisture in a damp brush will run down into the ferrule and collect moisture.

# DO'S AND DON'T'S FOR WATERCOLOR BRUSHES:

- Do** wash your hands before handling your brushes to remove any body oil or lotion.
- Do** wet your brush before picking up pigments.
- Do** rinse and reshape the brushes you are working with even during a painting session.
- Do** clean your brushes using soap and water to remove paint residue.
- Do** use tepid or lukewarm water for cleaning. Never use HOT water.
- Do** air-dry your brushes laying them on a flat dry surface. (or hanging from the handle hairs pointing downward.)
- Do** keep brushes in a brush holder to protect then tips from becoming crimped.
- Do** store dry brushes in air tight container when not in use for extended periods of time to protect then from moths and dust.

- Don't** pick up paint with a dry brush. (Wet the brush first by gently stroking it against the bottom of the water container to work out trapped air bubbles.)
- Don't** use a watercolor brush for painting with oils or acrylics, inks or dyes.
- Don't** use a good watercolor brush to apply maskoid, masking fluids or resists.
- Don't** let your watercolor brush dry out with paint in the hairs.
- Don't** pull a stuck dried brush from your palette (To remove: moisten it first to soften the dried paint to release the brush from the palette with out fraying the brush ends.)
- Don't** leave a brush standing on its head in a jar (wet or dry)
- Don't** submerge a brush beyond the ferrule for extended periods. (metal ring)
- Don't** try to reshape it using a scissors or a razor blade.
- Don't** pinch or pull at the hairs to remove excess moisture...be gentle.
- Don't** dry a watercolor brush with a hair dryer. (Air dry lying them flat)
- Don't** dry your brushes with the tips pointed up in a jar. (Ok for storing after drying.)
- Don't** use a good watercolor brush to scrub with.
- Don't** store a damp brush in an airtight container. This encourages mold and mildew.

For more fun watercolor tips visit my website: [www.susieshort.net/watercolor-tips.html](http://www.susieshort.net/watercolor-tips.html)

*Happy Painting!*

*Keep those brushes wet! Susie*