

Easy Tips for *Painting Poinsettias* in Watercolor Freehand (without a pattern)

Here is a simple formula for painting pretty poinsettias without a complex or complicated drawing. Follow these steps to paint your own versions of this popular Christmas flower. If you are new to watercolor this will be a fun flower for you to paint! For more experienced painters add more interest and details by using a variety of red hues to add depth and value. For this demo I'm painting on blank watercolor greeting cards but regular 140# CP watercolor paper will give you similar results. I always recommend using good paper for a good foundation. The results are worth the extra cost in the long run!

Here are some interesting poinsettia facts:

The colorful parts of the poinsettia are called bracts, while the true flowers are the small yellow centers. Some poinsettias have loose airy centers while other types are compact and grouped tightly together. Bracts come in white, pink, peach, yellow, marbled or speckled, as well as the traditional red. Poinsettias are not poisonous or toxic but I still don't recommend eating them.

Step 1: On dry paper, start by painting a cluster of yellow dots for the centers of the poinsettia. While the paint is still wet you may want to drop in some red or green paint into the yellow and allow the paint to mingle. I like to let the edges touch so the paint moves and mingles around more.

(**Optional step:** Allow the paint sit for 30 seconds or more then blot away the excess moisture. This not only speeds up the drying time it can also add some nice texture.)

Tip: The bracts will look more natural if they are not too uniformly spaced, in other words, leave unequal space between them.

Step 2: Next, using slightly diluted red watercolor paint the smaller new bracts. I usually start with 3 to 5 of these smaller petal shapes scattered at random around the yellow center. By using diluted color they will dry lighter, allowing you to paint the next row darker.

Tip: We will be adding darker color behind the centers so don't get too dark too soon.

An option is to paint the darker colors around the yellow centers at this stage, even before adding the larger bracts in the next step. Or you can wait and add the darker colors after you have painted more bracts.

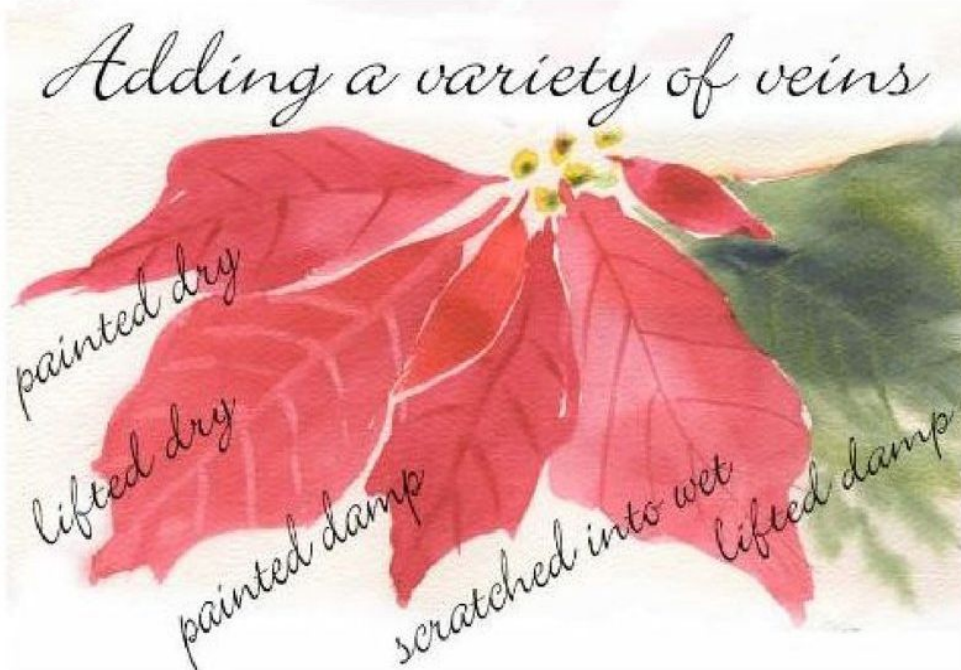
Step 3: When the first smaller bracts are dry continue by adding more petal shapes getting larger as you paint the next layer or row of bracts. These can be painted using more paint so they are a darker value near the center of the flower. Placement of the medium sized bracts can be between the smaller bracts or behind them as illustrated in these examples. I often leave a little white space between the shapes to help separate them.



Examples of poinsettia cards in progress

Step 4: Continue to add more bracts getting larger as you go. Some of the larger bracts might also have a notch on each side. For added interest, some red bracts might have green veins and some green leaves could have red veins. Glazing (adding a darker layer of paint) over dry areas near the center will add depth and shadows for a layered look.

Step 5: If you haven't painted the darker shapes around the yellow flowers in the center of the poinsettia now is the time to add those darks. See the enlargement for details.



While you are adding the red bracts you may want to add some veins by softly scratching into the wet paint with the end of your paint brush or a stylus. A tooth-pick will also work!

The illustration above shows some additional ideas for adding a variety of veins to your bracts. After you have painted as many bracts as you need for the poinsettia to look full you can add a few lush green bracts for contrast and balance.

Finishing touches: It's OK to leave the background white and unpainted. Or you may want to add a sprig of holly or pine needles or a ribbon to your composition. Make it your own!

If you prefer to work from a drawing or pattern ...

Here is a free 5 x 7 poinsettia pattern for you to print and transfer to your watercolor paper or greeting card. You can use it either horizontal or vertical.



You can use graphite paper placed between the line drawing and the watercolor card or paper but I find this method of transferring to be a little messy. I prefer to place the drawing under my card or paper and place it on a light box or hold it up to a window and let the light shine through it. Its amazing how clearly you can see the lines through the paper. Use a light touch to trace the lines so they can be easily erased when you complete your card.

Have fun! And if you paint this poinsettia or one like it I'd love to see it! Email it to susie@susieshort.net and I'll add it to my pretty poinsettia's painting page.

Happy Painting!

For more watercolor tips visit my website, Watercolor Learning Center

<http://learningcenter.susieshort.net>

For reference photos of poinsettias (with patterns)

<http://artstore.susieshort.net/patterns-poinsettias-1.html>