

**Watercolour Autumn Leaves**

In this session we'll be looking at using watercolour techniques to create autumn leaves. Watercolour paints can be used for all of this project or, if you prefer, watercolour pencils can be used nearer to the end to add detail.

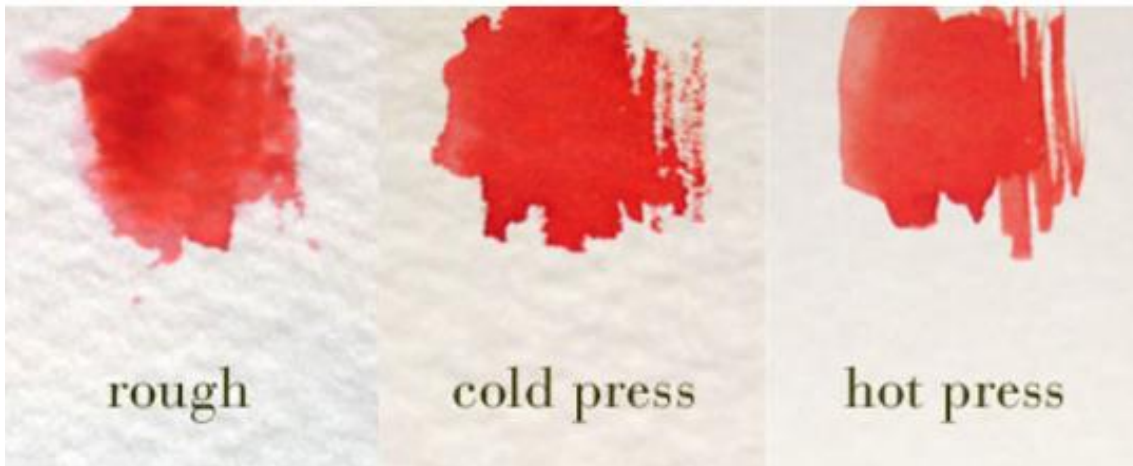


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## Do and Don'ts with watercolours:

- Watercolour paint will dry lighter. If you think you've made a mistake, don't be tempted to fiddle too much – chances are, mistakes will even out more once the paint is dry.
- Work light to dark and don't go in too heavy too soon!
- Watercolour paper will achieve better results as it allows the paint to be manipulated on the surface more easily than say cartridge paper, where the paint will simply soak in immediately.
- Keep two jars of water – one to wash brushes and the other as clean water to control the tone of your paint.
- It's important to work light to dark as once the paint is dry on the paper, it is difficult to get back to the white or the paper or the lighter colours
- Keep a scrap piece of paper to hand to try out colours first.
- Always feed the paint onto your paper where you want it to be darker first

## Types of watercolour paper



Watercolour paper comes in different varieties and weights. Depending on your requirements there are three main surface textures to choose from:

**Hot Press:** The texture is even and smooth. Because of its smooth surface the watercolour takes longer to absorb into the surface. Colours are more vivid and bright. It is good for precise styles of watercolours.

**Cold Press:** This is rougher than hot press paper with a slightly bumpy textured paper. The water absorbs more easily into the surface. The colours will be a little less vibrant than those on hot press paper. This is the most widely used paper for watercolour paintings as it allows you to add detail whilst still having some texture.

**Rough:** Rough texture has an even bumpier surface than cold press. This results in a grainier texture. This surface is good for exaggerated rough texture techniques and an expressive style.

If you'd like to work more with watercolours but are unsure of papers, I'd always recommend speaking to members of staff in a specialist art shop – they're always keen to share their expertise

## Main Task

Equipment: watercolour paper (I used cold pressed), size 6 or 8 round brush, size 0 or 2 round brush or even a rigger brush, pin, tape, palette with wells, two jars of water

Watercolour paints, colours needed: mid yellow, yellow ochre, vermillion or scarlet red, burnt sienna, burnt umber, violet, ultramarine blue

Additional extras: watercolour pencils.



1. Begin by taping your paper down to a board to create a border and using a HB or 2H pencil, lightly sketch out your leaf shape. Don't press on too hard or your pencil marks will be visible and you may even indent the paper.
2. In a palette place mid yellow in one well, yellow ochre with a little mid yellow in another well and make an orange with mid yellow and vermillion or scarlet in a third well. Water these down to the consistency of full fat milk. Begin to feed these in to your leaf, noticing where the darks and lights are using your size 6 or 8 round brush. Don't be tempted to fiddle too much – you want the three colours to merge into one another a little. Use clean water to control the tone and drag the colour out where needed. Allow to dry
3. Darken your mid yellow/ochre mix with a touch of violet (yellow and purple are complementary colours and will therefore darken one another). Look for where you see some of the mid brown colours and start to paint this in. Use a combination of putting the paint down onto the dry surface but also using clean water to wet some areas and feeding the colour in – this will create a mottled effect. Allow to dry.



4. Take your pin. We're going to use this to indent the paper and draw in the veins. Take care with this and look carefully at the shape of the veins.
5. Look at the colours of the veins in the image you're using. Mix up a very watery consistency of these – I watered down my orange and my brown. Sweep these over where you've drawn with the pin and the paint will gather in the indents. If you haven't applied enough pressure when using your pin, allow this paint to dry

and then score into the veins again. If you want a stronger colour, allow this layer to dry and then use less water in your paint to darken the veins further.

6. Add more red into your orange to darken it further and add more purple or even a touch of burnt umber into your mid brown to create a darker brown. Begin to use these stronger colours with less water to darken areas of the leaf. Swap to a smaller brush and begin to add some of the detail. Tip: to make the lighter veins stand out, add some darker colours either side. Allow to dry.



7. To help to create the illusion of the leaf coming off the paper, we're going to add a simple background. Lightly draw a frame around your leaf, allowing some of the leaf to come outside of this border. Mix a little burnt umber into ultramarine blue, just to stop the blue being too strong. Water this down to a watery milk consistency and apply around the leaf and up to the frame – you are aiming for a flat wash so work quickly with a size 8 round brush. Allow to dry.
8. Darken violet with a touch of mid yellow – you are aiming for a grey colour. Using a size 2 or 0 round brush, begin to add a shadow. On the stem, pull the shadow away from the stem so it doesn't touch the leaf itself – this will help to create a 3D illusion. Do consider the direction of light when working in the shadow. If you'd rather, this shadow could be added with a grey watercolour pencil.

## Photographic References

There's also nothing wrong with going out to collect your own leaves to paint. There's so many glorious colours out there at the moment.

