

COLOURWHEEL Art Classes
Soft Pastels: Spring Flowers



Spring is the air in more ways than one, so in this session, we'll be looking at using soft pastel to create an image of spring flowers. Don't feel that you need to stick to the image that I've included of crocuses. Get out there into your gardens and draw whatever spring flowers take your fancy. Snowdrops, daffodils, amaryllis and tulilps all look stunning on coloured paper. Don't have soft pastel? Try oil pastels. This can also be done using coloured or watercolour pencils.



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Soft Pastel Techniques

If you're new to pastels, try out some of these techniques before you start your piece of art to help you in your finished work.



Left to Right

Smooth Blend: Try applying pastels over each other, mixing colours on the paper. Lay in the first colour, using the length of the pastel stick. Start from the left and work your way right. Block in to past the area where the two colours will merge. Now start with the other colour, from right to left. When you get to the area where the two colours will merge, press lighter and lighter until the stick isn't touching the paper anymore. You may have to repeat the blending of the second colour once or twice, cleaning the pastel on the cloth after each pass. You now have a perfect blending with bright vibrant colours throughout

Unblended Strokes: This will create optical blending on the page. Try putting dark colours down first and then add your lighter shades. What happens if you lay down lighter colours first? Is the effect different?

Rule of 3 Mixing Colours: Mixing three colours creates a more interesting colour/effect with greater depth than mixing two.

I don't like to overmix by pastels as this can muddy colours but sometimes it is necessary. Experiment with different blending tools such as: **paper stump, finger, cotton bud, sponge, kitchen paper, a hard rubber.**

For this piece, I would recommend working from dark to light and not blending much with a finger. I've used lighter colours over darker ones to blend instead.

A few hints:

- If you're working in soft pastel, don't use a paper that is very smooth – you need a bit of a tooth to the paper to help the pastel adhere to the surface.
- No matter what surface of paper you use, there will be only so many layers of pastel that you can add before it reaches a saturation point; the pastel will no longer stick to the paper and layers underneath will be pushed from the surface. You'll also notice when this happens as
- In this tutorial, we'll be working from dark to light, allowing the lighter colours to blend the ones underneath – experiment with pressure; sometimes you'll want a hard blend and sometimes a very soft one where you simply drag the side of your pastel over the page
- If you want to soften any edges with blending, do try a cotton bud. It's nice and small and dainty so you'll be able to control any areas you want to blend easily.
- Don't work too small when working in pastel – you want a big enough area to really enjoy the medium. The image I've worked on is on A3 paper.

Equipment needed for main task: toned paper or cartridge paper, soft pastels, coloured pencils, cotton buds or a paper stump.

Reference Image



I'm using black paper so I'm using a white pencil to plan out my work. If you're working on a different toned paper or white paper, a 2H/HB pencil will do the job. Note how I've changed the reference image slightly- if you decide to do this, odd numbers look better. Also consider where you place these on the page to create a pleasing composition.

I begin by using a navy and purple soft pastel. I lay the navy down first to the very dark areas and then layer purple over the top to create a darker purple. For the mid purple hues, I simply lay the purple straight onto the paper. Press on hard if you're using a dark paper – you want the colours to be vibrant.



Now for some highlights. Using a fuchsia pink pastel and a very pale blue/purple (white could also be used) begin to add highlights taking note of the shapes that you see. Lighter pressure of these lighter colours over dark will also create some subtle blending.

For the stamen, use a mid or dark brown to lay down the darker areas first and then use an orange and then a yellow for highlights. Use a stippled mark for the saffron to create that furry effect.

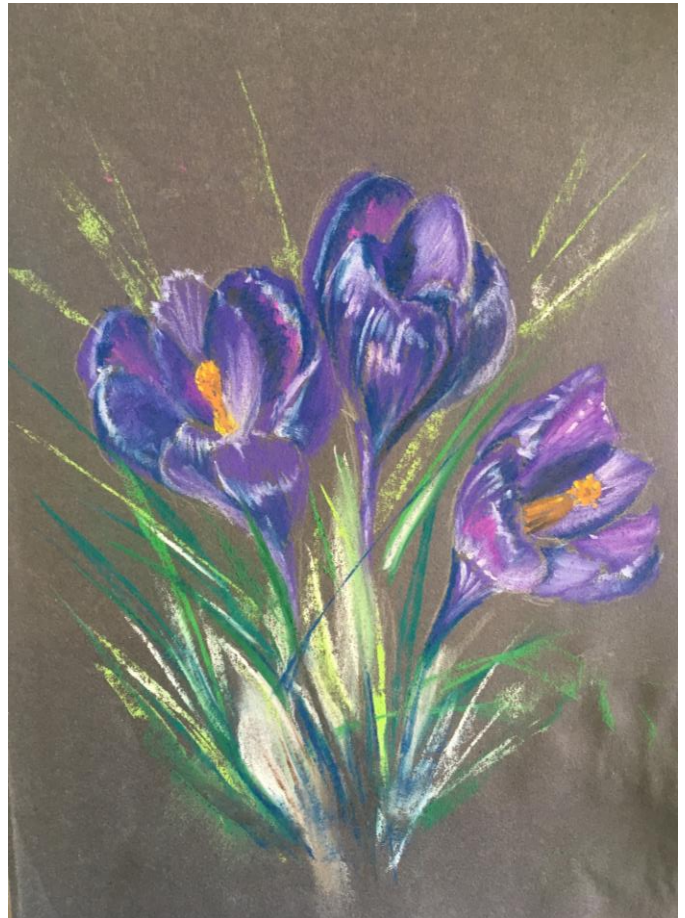


Work all of your flowers in. I'm right handed, so I work left to right. If you're left handed, work right to left to prevent smudging.

Now time for the leaves. Use a mixture of greens – a blue/green works well as well as some lighter ones. Make the pastel sticks work for you. To create the spiky crocus leaves, I use the pastel on its side but drag the sharp edge along the paper.



Once some greens have been worked in, take a white soft pastel and work in the papery part of the stems and also use this to blend some of the greens to create shadow.



I want to keep my pastel work quite loose, so once I've worked in those highlights on the leaves and stems, I use a navy blue and pale grass green to add a variety of marks for texture. Note the different pressures – sometimes I want to see through the pastel to the paper. Finally, I add a few light marks to hint at leaves above the crocuses. **Tip:** if you like more detail in your work, soft coloured or watercolour pencils work well over the top of soft pastels. You can also sharpen your soft pastels on a piece of sand paper to gain a finer point for detail.