

Eco-Friendly Painting Guide

Have you ever felt like your passion for creativity and your love of nature are at odds with each other? I hear you! I felt this way for a long time, so I finally decided to do some research to find out if it's possible to paint in a more eco-friendly way. Turns out it is possible, and I am thrilled to share my findings with you so that together we can live more responsibly and sustainably, even in those areas of our lives where it might seem impossible. This guide identifies the most problematic aspects of painting and then walks you through simple steps that you can take to green up your painting process, so that you can get back to focusing on the creative flow instead of worrying about your environmental footprint.

The Problems

- 1) Toxic pigments:** Paint contains pigments, which create colour. Many of these pigments are toxic, and some are known or suspected carcinogens. These are not only a danger to us while we are using them, but they can also be dangerous to the environment and ourselves when we dispose of our rinse water.
- 2) Fillers and binders:** Acrylic paints contain plastic. Most manufactured paints whether they are acrylic, watercolour, oil or something else, contain chemical ingredients that can be hazardous to humans and the environment when we dispose of our rinse water.
- 3) Packaging:** Let's be honest, paint, and all those little containers and plastic packages it comes in, might just be the farthest thing from "zero-waste".

The Solutions

Okay, now that we know what we're dealing with, let's look at what we can do about it.

1) Use paint that contains only non-toxic pigments and ingredients.

Here a few options for this:

- [Natural Earth Paints](#) uses only non-toxic and earth friendly ingredients. They sell raw pigment in powder form as well as the materials to mix with it to create your paint. Here are some of their guides:

[Natural Earth Paint Recipes](#)

[How to Make Natural Oil Paints](#)

- [Beam Paints](#) makes watercolour paints and oil painting medium that are plant-based and that do not use heavy metals as pigment sources.
- [Blick Art Materials](#) lists Material Safety Data Sheets online for each of their paint colours, so you can easily find out which colours contain toxic pigments. Compared to most large paint manufacturers they are forthcoming about safety, ecological, and regulatory information regarding their paint ingredients, and give detailed responses to questions if you email them. They don't use synthetic binders or fillers, but some of their pigments are synthetic.
- [Make paint yourself](#) - There are lots of DIY natural paint recipes online. Creating paint that doesn't spoil before you have used it up and being able to create archival artwork from your paint are considerations.


This list is by no means extensive and I'm sure there are other paint companies out there who are working to green up their ingredients at this very moment. Don't be afraid to reach out to companies yourself and ask if they can provide safety, ecological, and regulatory information regarding their paint ingredients.

2) Avoid acrylic paints.

Speaking as a former acrylic painter, this can be a tough pill to swallow – I know. But take this as an opportunity to challenge yourself creatively and try some new materials and techniques. I had become so accustomed to using acrylics I forgot that back in the day when I was a wee art student, I loved the level of depth and detail that oil paints allowed. My journey to green up my art practice inspired me to try a whole new series in oil and I have never looked back. And don't be afraid to use up the acrylics you currently have on the go – see #4 below for tips on safe rinse water disposal.

3) Buy paints that come in reduced, recyclable and compostable packaging.

Natural Earth Paint and Beam Paints both avoid plastic in their packaging, and use compostable, biodegradable, and reusable packaging for their products. Manufactured watercolours such as Blick Art Materials often come in metal tubes, which are recyclable as long as they are emptied and cleaned.



4) Dispose of rinse water safely. Pollutants like acrylics and toxic chemicals are more dangerous in liquid form because they contaminate entire water systems, whereas solids can be contained. Paint that is dried solid will not leach toxic chemicals even if it gets wet again, so excess paint is better disposed of in dried, solid form as opposed to being washed down the sink. Non-toxic and earth friendly products like Natural Earth Paint and Beam Paints do not contain any harmful ingredients and therefore your rinse water can be washed down the sink without causing pollution. Paints that contain ingredients that are not earth friendly can be used without polluting water systems by taking the following steps:

- Keep a rag handy to wipe as much paint off your brushes as possible before rinsing them.
- Use as little rinse water as possible. I use a container with about an inch of water in it.
- When you are done with your rinse water, pour it into a large container filled with sand. This works kind of like a kitty litter box – the water will evaporate while the paint ingredients will remain in the container. Whenever you use the sand container it should be kept uncovered and in the sun to dry. Once the rinse water has evaporated, cover the sand container with a lid to avoid breathing harmful dust particles.

- Keep the same sand container for the duration of your artistic life. The contents of the sand container will eventually become waste but will not need to be disposed of until you no longer have a need to use it. Better yet, when you are finished with it, pass it on to another artist instead of disposing of it.

Lastly, remember that change happens one small step at a time, so don't feel daunted at the thought of having to implement everything all at once. Good luck on your artistic journey and thank you for taking the first step towards making your art practice more eco-friendly!