

Botanical Art for Beginners

Mixing Greens and Browns



Green is probably the most problematic colour for students. Mixing from primary colours will help you to gain a better understanding and to mix the different colour greens across the surface of a plant. Often the colour can shift, for example a yellow biased green can shift to blue biased green and colour can be altered by adding more blue or yellow, but using the same constituent colours. You also have to learn to see how the interaction of light affects the colour and be able to identify underlying colours, many leaves with a shine have an underlying blue wash, as it the case in the Ivy leaf above.

To the right: A rich dark green is mixed with Indanthrene Blue + Transparent Yellow, then a small quantity of Permanent Carmine red is added to make a natural looking green.

Always be cautious with the amount of red used, add in very small increments to reach the desired colour as adding too much will result in brown.

Using a dark blue will yield a dark green simply because it is darker in tone, so always use an appropriate blue to mix greens. Light blues = light greens, mid blues = mid greens and dark blues = dark greens



Making a Green and Brown Colour Chart

The best way of getting to grips with understanding greens is to paint a colour chart using primary palette. Green is made from mixing:

Blue + Yellow = Green

But most green mixes for plants also contain a small amount of red, different greens can be any of your blues, yellows and reds but some combinations are better than others.



Blue + Yellow + small amount of Red = more natural Greens

The addition of a small amount of red makes a more natural looking red, adding more red and yellow will eventually make **Brown** altering the ratios again can make **Grey** or even **Black**.

So:



Red + Yellow + small amount of Blue = Brown

And



Blue + Red + small amount of Yellow = Grey or Black

You must experiment with the ratios of paint to see what is possible, remember that huge number of outcomes with minor differences are possible.

IMPORTANT: The most important colour in determining the outcome is the lightness or light value of the blue.

If you look at the Green Chart below, you will see that I have categorised the Blues into **Light Blues**, **Medium Blues** and **Dark Blues**.

NOTE: Manganese Blue is intended as an alternative to Cerulean but it is difficult to find as the colour is discontinued, there is an alternative Manganese Blue Hue available if you wish to try it. The reason I prefer Manganese Blue to Cerulean is because it is transparent, Cerulean is not. But either will do the job of making light greens, so you may leave out the Manganese if you do not have it.



Exercise. Painting the Green Chart

Using the colours outlined in the chart on Page 3, Paint a colour chart.

The one shown is approximately A3 in size, painted on Arches HP 140lb paper. This is a lengthy exercise and takes around a day or more to complete. It requires lots of brush washing between mixes to keep colours free from contamination

1. Identify all of the colours in the chart and paint swatches of the blue and yellows on the left hand side of the sheet. It may help if you draw guide lines with pencil first, each colour swatch is around 1 cm wide by 1.5 cm high, painted using a size 3 Flat brush
2. With each blue and yellow combination, start by painting an equal ratio mix of blue and yellow, then a 2:1 and a 1:2 mix. This is just a rough estimate based on what you put on the palette, don't use too much water but a fairly creamy mix.
3. Add a very small amount of the red, and paint a swatch, then add slightly more red, repeat this until the colour is no longer green.
4. Repeat this for each mix blue and yellow combination and try with different reds as shown

So to clarify from the top row example in the chart, using the Cerulean Blue, which is a high light value blue.

1. Mix Cerulean with Lemon Yellow Nickel Titanate at 1:1 ratio, 2:1 ration and 1.2 ration to see the difference. Paint a swatch of each
2. With each of these mixes add a small amount of quinacridone magenta, paint a swatch of each, then add more of the Quinacridone magenta to shift the colour towards a brown, do as many as you feel are useful. Quinacridone magenta is a cool red so it makes a grey brown.
3. Try the same green and yellow mixes with a different red, in the chart I used the warmer red quinacridone red, this makes a warmer green and brown.
4. Repeat using Winsor lemon and Winsor yellow as shown in the second and third rows
5. Repeat for each of the different blues using the colours specified.

PLEASE NOTE: This is not an exact science of colour mixing, there is no such thing and it is not possible to accurately measure quantity, you have to estimate the quantity but over time it will become intuitive. What is important is that you experiment with colour to see what you can mix.

This is a very useful exercise and you can adapt it using different blues, yellows and reds, the chart shown, merely represents the colour palette that I use. Once you have completed such a chart you can use it to identify suitable green mixes by placing your leaves on the sheet to match the green.