



Utrecht Art Supplies

The Risks of Soaking Brushes



Ask the Expert: "I sometimes tend to leave my brushes soaking all day. How bad is this habit? What's the risk?"

A: Soaking brushes is sometimes necessary as a last resort when paint has dried in the tuft, but normally we strongly recommend against leaving brushes to soak for long periods. Leaving brushes immersed in solvents or water can completely ruin your essential tools. In addition to the bent tips that inevitably result from leaving brushes to stand point-down, solvents and even plain water can damage or destroy brushes, given enough time.

Most natural hair and some synthetic brushes can resist the destructive effects of solvents and thinners, at least for the duration of a normal painting session. When left immersed too long, however, brush filaments may begin to absorb solvent. When this happens, the tuft can swell and lose shape. Bristles can also become brittle and dry after repeated soaking, and may break off easily. Glue at the base of the tuft can soften from long contact with solvents, and bristles may fall out. Lacquer on the

brush handle is usually resistant to solvents, but some citrus-based brush cleaners can strip paint from the handle.

Soaking brushes in water can be particularly destructive. Natural hairs can become saturated with water and may become distorted. Water also causes wooden brush handles to swell. When this happens, the ferrule (the metal collar that holds the tuft to the handle) is forced open. When the handle dries out and shrinks, the expanded ferrule will be loose, and may wiggle in the hand or even detach completely.

In order to get the longest useful life from brushes, instead of leaving them immersed while painting, rinse frequently and blot dry as you work. When it's absolutely necessary to keep brushes wet, use a solvent tank with a coiled handle that can hold brushes without allowing the tips to rest on the bottom of the container.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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