



Utrecht Art Supplies

Ask the Expert: Safflower Oil as a Paint Vehicle

Ask the Expert: " I notice that some of your oil paints are made with safflower oil or a mix of safflower and linseed oil. I always thought linseed was the best for oil paint. Is there any problem using safflower, alone or in combination?"



A: Safflower can definitely be considered a reliable binder in laboratory-formulated, rigorously tested oil paints like Utrecht Brand. In a homemade painting medium, the artist might see a greater benefit from linseed oil over safflower, especially if the oil represents a high proportion of the final film. As most artists know, however, it's never a good practice to use oil excessively on the palette.

Safflower oil is sometimes used in place of linseed oil in whites and light, cool hues where the characteristic amber color of linseed might be apparent in the finished product.

The degree of color in drying oils has to do with the fatty acid content of the material. While color alone isn't an absolute indicator, oil with a higher ratio of linolenic to linoleic acid is generally more yellow.



(Image: Raw safflower seeds, the source of safflower oil)

The vehicle for each color in our Professional Oils assortment is selected individually to bring the pigment to its best advantage. The final formula is developed by paint chemists and the Resident Artist. The role of pigment as a solid aggregate as well as its properties of absorbency and influence on drying are important factors. Amendments are also applied to optimize drying rate, workability and performance. This approach allows us to deliver the best qualities of the raw materials while managing variations in drying and curing. Many Utrecht Oil Colors are still made using linseed oil as the vehicle; in some cases a combination of oils may be used where judged necessary.

There are important differences between linseed and safflower oil which every oil painter should understand. Safflower oil dries at a slower rate than linseed, and also behaves differently as it dries. While linseed oil forms a top skin fairly quickly, safflower oil tends to dry throughout the entire film, becoming more viscous before a solid forms.

Some older texts criticize the use of what are sometimes called "semi-drying oils" including safflower and poppy. While it is true that linseed oil has performed very well in historical painting, other nut and seed oils have also been employed for centuries with stable results.

While arguably not the equal of linseed oil, safflower, poppy and walnut oil (all similar in ratio of linolenic to linoleic acids) remain proven paint vehicles for artists' colors. With a good understanding of the properties of the material, any painter can use safflower-based paint with great success.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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