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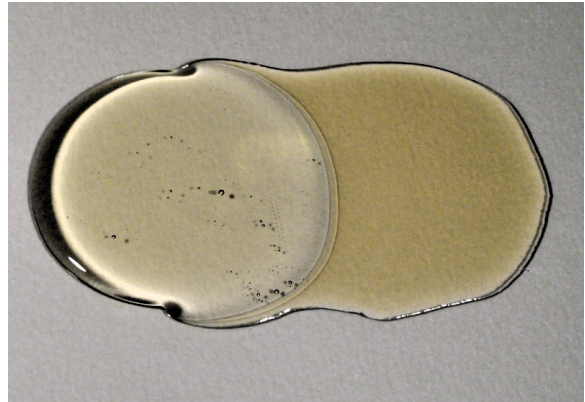
Just for Fun: The Color Range of Drying Oils

"Why is linseed oil more yellow than safflower? Is one better than the other for oil painting?"



Oil paint vehicles and mediums range in color from very neutral to yellow/amber color. Linseed oil, the best overall in terms of drying and film-forming, also tends to have a yellow cast, while others (safflower, poppy, walnut) are more neutral. Neutral-colored oils are still perfectly suitable for permanent art.

The pigment load in paint almost completely obscures the weak color of linseed oil, but in some cases it's desirable to use alternatives. Whites and pale, cool colors are often prepared in safflower or poppy oil. Dispersing white pigments in more neutral-colored oils is known to have been a common practice in many of the Northern schools during the 17th century. The treatise of William Beurs, for example, instructs that white pigments should be ground in the "very best poppy oil". For paintings with light, cool color, some artists prefer to use safflower or poppy oil in the medium instead of linseed.



The degree of color has to do with the fatty acid content of the material. While color alone isn't an absolute indicator, linseed oil with higher ratio of linolenic to linoleic acid is generally more yellow. Since linolenic acid is in part what makes linseed oil a good drier and film former, yellow color often indicates a good quality oil for painting.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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