



Utrecht Art Supplies

Achieving greater economy with your paint



Ask the Expert: "How can I get my colors to go farther? I need to stretch my budget without looking like I'm using student grade paint."

A: There are many ways to reduce the amount of paint you're consuming without sacrificing results on the canvas. By eliminating waste and spoilage along with skillful use of mediums, it's possible to get a lot more from your colors.

Proper Storage

Paint containers should be closed tightly and stored in an environment that doesn't promote drying or spoilage. Exactly what conditions are best depends on the medium.

Oils: Oil paints are very forgiving of storage temperature, so winter cold and summer heat really don't affect them much. It's particularly important that oil paints are capped tightly in storage because it takes very little contact with the air to induce drying. Some artists keep a cotton ball soaked in essential oil of clove inside the paint box to retard drying. Since oil paint dries by oxidation, the eugenol in clove oil slows drying by creating an antioxidant atmosphere. For particularly fast-drying tube colors, a small amount of clove oil can be swabbed inside the cap to retard skinning.

Acrylics: Acrylic colors and mediums can be stored in fairly warm temperatures provided they are tightly closed, and can be kept in cold (not freezing) storage as long as they are allowed to warm up to room temperature prior to use. Acrylic paints and mediums should never be allowed to freeze, as this can cause irreversible clotting.

Prevent Spoilage: Older acrylics in jars that have lost some of their preservatives may develop mold in storage, particularly in warm conditions. To boost antimicrobial protection, apply a light coating of Lysol disinfectant spray to the paint surface before closing the jar. Orthophenyl phenol (the active ingredient in Lysol) will prevent mold, and the alcohol carrier will not harm your paint.

To further prevent mold, use a clean palette knife or non-porous utensil to take paint from the jar. To avoid introducing spores or contaminants, avoid dipping brushes directly into jars or putting leftover paint back in with fresh.

Invest in a covered palette: Several manufacturers offer artist's palettes with tight-fitting lids. These are highly effective at keeping acrylics wet and keeping dust out of all types of paint. There is still enough air under a lidded palette to allow oil paint to dry, but a cotton swab with clove oil can be placed in a corner of the palette (away from colors) to retard oxidation.

Dispense paint in a long bead

While a generous dollop of paint looks nice on the palette, it's hard to tell exactly how much paint is leaving the tube. That nice pile of paint gets dirty fast, and often quite a lot of paint is left over. Instead, try placing paint in straight, uniform lines. This approach provides a more objective measurement than a fat dollop so you're less likely to deposit too much. As an

added benefit, colors stay cleaner as you work from one end of the bead to the other.

Buy in bulk and fill your own tubes

Basic oil paint staples like Titanium White can be purchased in pints and quarts, but unless you can use up the entire container in a few weeks, it's likely you'll end up throwing away some dried paint with the container. In order to get the best value from bulk containers it's essential to get all the paint out of the package. If there's just a little left in the can, use a palette knife to transfer it to an empty collapsible aluminum tube, and crimp the end with a tube wringer or canvas pliers.

Learn to use mediums and extenders effectively

Mediums are generally less expensive than artist's colors, so modifying and extending more costly colors is a great way to increase the volume of mixtures while imparting desirable optical and textural properties. Professional-grade artist's paints are dense and pigment-rich, and can be mixed with a considerable amount of medium or extender with no apparent change in mass tone. The addition of painting medium actually enhances the appearance of some very deep colors because it allows light to better penetrate the mixture.

Particularly with oils, it's best to use mediums in the minimum effective amount. Add a little at a time until you achieve a balanced mixture with the correct transparency, brightness and body for your application. Acrylic mediums can be used more liberally, even with very little paint added.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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