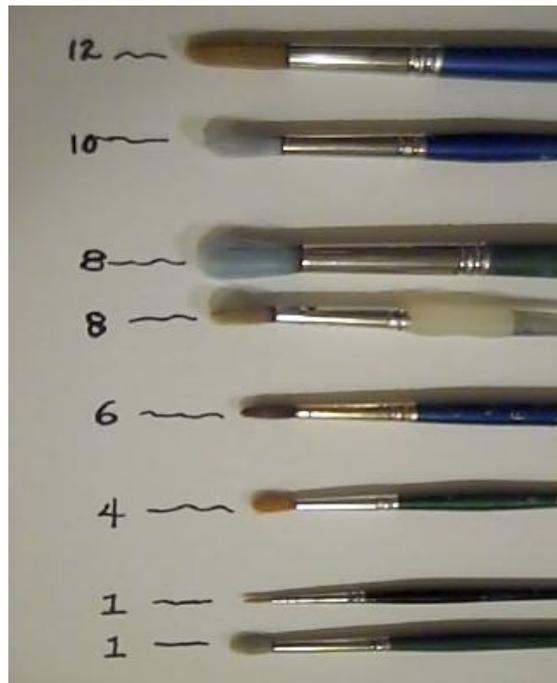


## **CHOOSING THE RIGHT BRUSH FOR ACRYLIC & MIXED MEDIA PAINTING**



It can get somewhat confusing deciding on the right brushes when first starting to paint with acrylic or mixed media painting. I hope that the following information may help to answer some of your questions. The main topics that I want to cover are the types, sizes, and some basic strokes that can be applied by each brush mentioned. Properly caring for your brushes is also important. I will focus mainly on the most often used brushes. However, there are a few specialty brushes and painting tools that I will discuss briefly as well.

## BRUSH SIZES



Determining the correct brush size needed can get somewhat confusing. To avoid unnecessary confusion, I'll keep it short and simple. Different manufacturers assign different numbers to the same physical size brush. For example, what may be a #1 round in one brand may very well be considered #4 in another brand. Brush sizes are not universal. That would be too simple.

If you look at the example of the round brushes above, you will see that each brush has a number that identifies its size. Notice that the two #1 brushes are not the same physical size. The same goes for the two #8 brushes. Also notice how the #8 is larger than the #10. These brushes were made by various manufacturers. The higher the number assigned by its manufacturer, the larger the brush size will be within that manufacturer's selection.

There is really no big secret or mystery to it. Simply put, the big guys get to assign the brush sizes. We eagerly buy them up; and in most cases, more than we know what to do with. There are all kinds of new types of brushes on the market today. It can become overwhelming for a beginner. Even a seasoned artist can act like a kid in the candy store when purchasing brushes if not careful. But regardless, there will always be universal brushes most widely used by artists as these brushes

will never be replaced. The round and flat are the most popular paintbrushes throughout the world.



Here is an example of two flat brushes by different manufacturers where both are #10s.



Some brush manufacturers may simply give the measurement of the width of the brush bristles as its size verses assigning it a number.

## BRUSH TYPES



Notice that the first flat brush above has longer bristles than the one beneath it, yet their widths are the same. While they are both flat brushes; the bottom brush has shorter bristles, is square shaped, and is also called a bright. It holds less paint and therefore, its stroke will be shorter.



The spotter and the round brush are difference as seen above. The spotter is the smaller of the two brushes. Its bristles are very short and it usually has less than a dozen bristles and made of sable. It holds only a little paint and is most useful for applying highly detailed work. It is a delicate brush. If you leave it in your container of water even for a short period, the bristles are sure to bend, leaving it useless. The small round can also be used to apply fine detail work. It can hold a lot more paint than a spotter and available in various sizes, starting at #000.

When painting, take advantage of the brush. Use all sides and the tip of the bristles, and don't forget the tip of the handle as well. Move the brush in different directions, using different pressure to see what effects can be achieved when applying both thick and thin layers of paint.

BRUSH TYPES

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BRUSH STROKES



This **bright** is used for blending and shading, and applying well defined short strokes. Its chisel edge is perfect for creating thin straight lines.

The longer bristle **flat** holds plenty of paint and therefore is perfect for applying thick layers and producing long straight strokes. The Chisel edge is also perfect for creating straight lines.



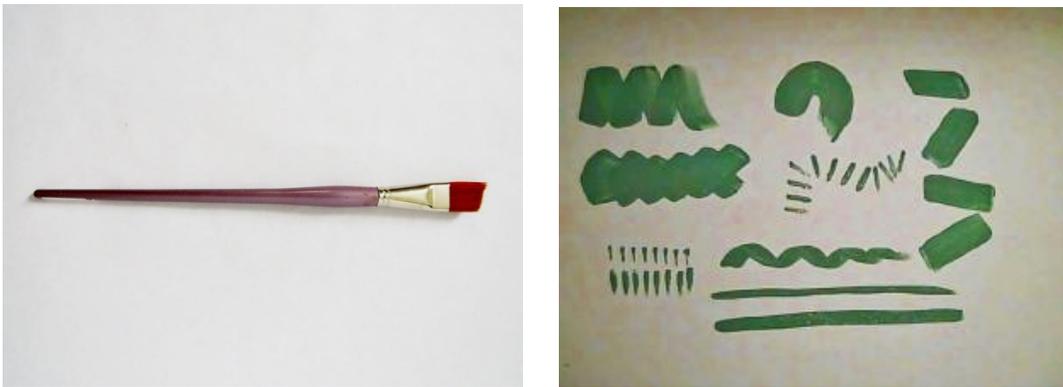
The **wash** is a larger flat made to hold more water. It is primarily used for flat washes as in water color painting, but works great for acrylic washes and painting larger areas as well.



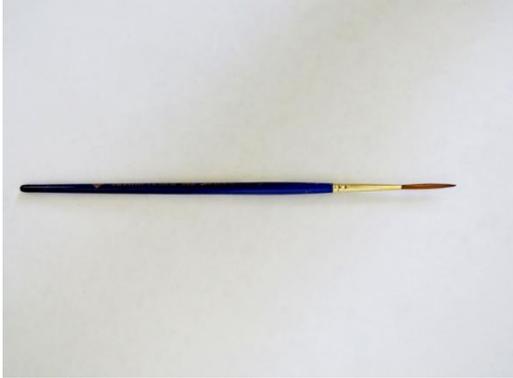
The **round** is good for stroke work and painting fine lines and detail work, depending on its size. A round can hold a nice amount of fluid paint so that the stroke is wide as you press, and thins out as you release the pressure and lift the brush. It is also handy for touching in and creating various shapes. The round comes in many sizes with some having a sharper tip than others. The examples in the top right photo were created with the medium and a small round was used for the bottom three rows.



The **filbert** is basically a flat with a curved tip. It is known for its ability to produce various marks. Depending on the pressure, you can control the width of the stroke and the tapering marks it can produce. It is also good for filling in shapes with curved edges. Use the sides as well to create grass and foliage.



The **angular** is basically a flat with an angled edge. It is good for shading, precise lines and curved strokes, as well as reaching in corners or small areas with its tip. It is also useful for applying heavy color.



The **script liner** has long bristles and a pointed tip. The **rigger** is a liner with long bristles and an angled edge. This brush is great for painting long thin strokes and working fine detail as with tree branches, grass, hair or whiskers. Also best for signing.



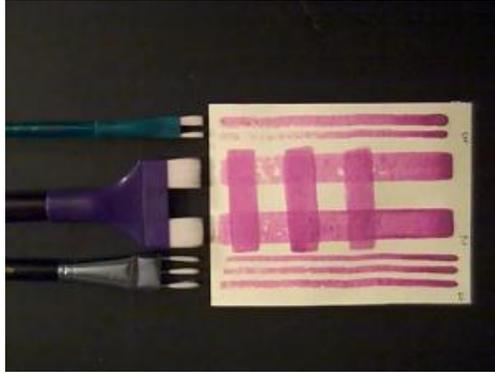
The **fan** brush, which is obvious where it got its name, is used mainly for blending and smoothing out unwanted visible strokes, and creating blends and transitions between colors. It is also useful for creating fur and highlights in hair as well as creating leaves and foliage. There are also various texture effects that can be achieved with a fan brush depending on its bristle type, size and thickness. Stiff bristles work good for creating foliage and various textures. Soft bristles work nicely for creating subtle texture and blends.



The **mop** brush has very soft brushes with lots of hair. This brush can hold a large amount of thin paint or water for washes. It is also used for dry blending and for lifting wet paint and puddles. It can hold more paint for a wash than the flat wash brush, and cover a larger area. Using a good quality mop brush, also known as a makeup brush, makes an excellent substitute. Extra time is required to thoroughly clean a mop brush.



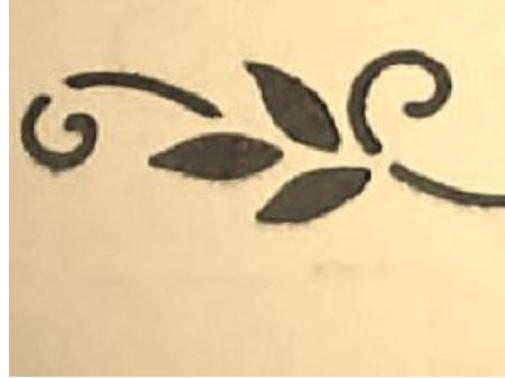
The **blender** is another very soft bristle brush. As you may have guessed, it is used for blending and softening large areas quickly. It is very soft like the mop brush.



The **Multi-liners** are also inexpensive specialty brushes. They are good for decorative and abstract paintings. As you can see above, the first brush also called a multi-liner can save you a lot of time verses using a single liner brush. The second example is the checkerboard which speaks for itself. The third brush is called a striper.



The **scruffy** brush is an inexpensive specialty brush. This soft bristle brush was useful for stippling and producing sponge like effects as seen above. Good for creating foliage effect.



The **stencil brush** is always round with stiff bristles cut flat so that the paint does not get under the stencil as easy as it would with a paint brush. The dense collection of bristles can cover large areas evenly. Apply the paint using the stippling technique. Visit the techniques page for the art glossary of terms.

## PARTS OF THE PAINTBRUSH



A cheaper brush will have bristles that are trimmed the same length across, where a good quality brush will have what is called bristle flagging or split ends at its tip. The split ends allow for a smoother application.

The more bristles a brush has, the more paint it can hold. This allows you more time to paint; resulting in a cleaner edge because you won't have to stop to load your brush as often.

The ferrule holds the bristles (brush head) against the handle. It is most often metal. A good quality brush will have a stainless steel ferrule to prevent it from rusting. The crimp is the compressed part of the ferrule that is placed over the handle which brings the handle to the brush head. Try not to get paint embedded into the heel. Embedded paint in the heel will force the bristles to separate apart. Even small amounts of dried paint embedded in the bristles, especially at the heel will change the brush shape and functionality.

## CATEGORIES OF PAINTBRUSHES



There are three categories of artist brushes: The natural stiff bristle like hog hair as seen here on the left, the manmade synthetic in the center, and natural soft animal hair like sable on the right.

**Natural stiff bristles**, like hog hair is used for applying oil paint, but it can be used for acrylic where heavy textured brush strokes are desired.

**Synthetic** brushes are manmade and best suited for allowing acrylic paint to ride its bristles as it should verses being absorbed into natural hair bristles. Synthetic is therefore widely popular for most acrylic paint applications. The bristles are available in stiff, medium, and soft.

**Soft animal hair** is mainly used for watercolor or delicate passage in oil painting, but also works for fluid or thinned acrylic paint, ink, and air brush paint. A good animal hair brush should have a spring to it. In other words when you pull back on the wet bristles, they will spring back in place. Do not waste your time or money on an animal hair brush that doesn't spring back when tested.

## BRUSH CARE



When painting, rinse your brush and lay it on a damp surface such as a paper towel or sponge versus in a cup of water. Leaving your brush in a container of water can bend the bristles and damage a wooden handle.

Never use hot water to clean a brush. Rinse the brush first with cool to lukewarm water to remove most buildup. Then continue with mild dish soap or a bar of brush soap to completely wash away remaining material. Create some suds by gently rotating the brush in a circular motion in the palm of your wet hand or over a bar of wet soap; making sure to also clean where the bristles and heel meet. Rinse the brush and repeat if necessary by rotating the brush in the opposite direction. Shake off the excess water and reshape the bristles with your fingers. Always lay your brush flat, allowing it to dry overnight before storing it with the bristles pointing up. Storing a wet or even a damp brush before it has had time to completely dry can cause the ferrule to rust and the crimp to separate from its handle. Remember that rust can form under the heel as well. The wet interior of a ferrule can damage the filament or epoxy setting, form mildew that spreads to the bristles and the wooden handle where they connect. Always take the time to thoroughly clean your brushes. The time spent properly cleaning and storing your brushes is well worth the benefits of them lasting longer and producing greater results.

It is not necessary to use your more expensive paint brushes to apply a varnish or lacquer. A nice soft bristle synthetic varnishing brush will work just as well. Most large art supply stores will carry varnishing brushes. Don't bother with a cheap natural hair varnishing brush. It's guaranteed to shed.

Assign a brush or two as specifically for varnishing so that left behind paint stain is not transferred when varnishing. Varnish will draw out any paint stain left in the bristles of a brush. This stain will easily transfer over the surface of a painting thus destroying the piece. Use a 2" or wider brush for larger paintings.

### **TIPS FOR PURCHASING THE RIGHT PAINTBRUSH**

Know what you want your brush to do before purchasing it. A really cheap brush is very limited in its functions and its bristles can easily fall out onto your work. If the bristles will not spring back when wet, then it is deemed useless. Cheap natural hair bristles such as squirrel tends to lack spring back when its wet bristles are pulled back. Synthetic bristles work best for acrylic applications. Acrylic needs to ride the bristles, not absorb into the bristles as it will do with natural hair types. I reserve the use of natural hair with acrylic paint only for working with thinly diluted or fluid viscosity paint to achieve results similar to watercolor.

When shopping for the right brush, ask yourself a few questions: What results do you expect? What medium(s) are you using? What techniques do you want to achieve? Can the brush properly handle the medium and provide the best end result? How durable is the brush? What is your budget? Are you new to painting and not yet sure how much time and money you want to invest? Keep in mind that a good quality brush when properly taken care of will outlast many cheap brushes combined.

To start, I recommend that you invest in the following five sizes of med range quality synthetic brushes:

- Small round
- Medium round,
- Small flat or bright
- Medium 3/4" or 1" filbert
- 1" flat

A few additional brushes to add later:

A #2 liner is a wonderful brush for producing long thin strokes and signature. This brush holds more paint than a small round brush is capable of.

A medium soft bristle fan, mop, or blender, depending on what you want it to do if used other than just blending.

## PAINTING TOOLS

Using a palette knife or a painting knife is another way to apply paint and achieve lots of wonderful texture as with impasto painting. There are some technical differences between the two types of knives, but there is no set rule that says you can't use them interchangeably. You can use either type of knife to mix the paint on your palette or mix and push paint around on the canvas. The textures that can be achieved are endless.



A **palette knife** has a long slim blade with a curved tip. It may or may not have a slight crank (bent handle). It can be metal or plastic. It is also good for scraping paint from the palette. See the left outer knife in the above photo.



**Painting knives** like paintbrushes come in various shapes and sizes to achieve a multitude of applications and effects. They are usually made of metal, are flexible, and set in a wooden handle. These small painting knives each have a large crank in its handle to help prevent your knuckles from touching wet paint. They can be used to mix paint and apply other wet mediums as well.



Here are three large painting knives to the right and four spackling knives to the left, and a large trowel at center right. Each can be used to apply texture and paint. These knives also come in handy for scraping and lifting. Notice that the spackling knives and the trowel do not have a crank as the three large painting knives do.



**Color shapers/paint erasers**, have silicone tips of various shapes, sizes, and firmness. They are used to push the paint around. They are best used for creating sgraffito (scraffito), blending pastels, charcoals, and pencils. They are also useful for carving into uncured clay.



These assorted paint application tools are only a few examples of what can be used for creating wonderful textures and unique surface techniques. They can also help save time when covering large areas. Also consider a toothbrush, stamping, cotton swabs, old rags, paper towels, cheese cloth, and even your fingers as painting and texturing tools.



Daubers, also known as sponcers are small and useful for stenciling. Patterns can be cut into the foam for producing some unique textures and shapes.