

Filling Your Acrylic & Mixed Media Art Box On A Tight Budget:

The Starving Artist's Materials & Art Supplies List

Hopefully this list will inspire you enough to explore, experiment, and create beyond just traditional painting techniques. Keep in mind that the lower quality of some of the mediums on this list will have an effect on the final outcome of your art. They are recommended only as a starting point if on a tight budget and for beginners to experiment with. Don't invest too much money in art materials until you are sure that you want to explore the medium(s) further.

Acrylic Paint: I recommend the heavy body student grade tube paint or craft paint to start. Please don't waste your time or money on the box set of acrylic paints in the skinny little tubes; even if on a very tight budget. They are at best for children to play with. While they lack pigment, most importantly they lack the amount of polymer emulsion necessary as the binder to adhere the paint to the canvas. They are not the quality of acrylic paint that you want to learn anything with. They are cheaper than even the cheapest 2 ounce bottle craft paints. You will not enjoy the painting experience when these really cheap tube paints offer. For more information on acrylic paints and what they are used for, visit the website's 'TECHNIQUES' page under 'ACRYLIC'.

Paintbrushes: Synthetic brushes are most often used and recommended for applying acrylic paint. Their prices vary but they cost far less than a good quality natural hair brush. For more information about paintbrushes and their capabilities, see the 'TECHNIQUES' page under 'Paintbrushes & Tools' for some very useful information.

Creating art can get expensive fast. It is said that a true artist will purchase a tube of paint before a loaf of bread. I don't want to see you starve, so hopefully this article will help you save enough on materials that you are able to purchase paints and brushes; but only after a loaf of bread.

Although you may already have access to many of the materials listed here, always be on the lookout for new possibilities. Think of ways materials around you can be used as tools and mediums for applying unique techniques to various surfaces. You will eventually develop a habit of seeing things around you from an artist's perspective; that would make a nice... or I could use that to create... We creatives tend to naturally see in this way.

Don't feel that you have to go out and buy every art tool you see. For example, why bother with purchasing a combing tool used for applying texture when you can just as easily use a broken or cheap comb, or even a plastic fork. Use the bottom of a spoon or the smooth handle of a pair of scissors to burnish if you do not own a burnishing tool. You can even make your own custom stamps and textured surfaces instead of buying them. Finding ways to substitute an item for something else will allow you to invest money in materials that you need most like brushes and paints.

Most of the following items can be found around the home and through other resources for little to no cost. I have often substituted art supplies with found items and created some really unique results. Although I used store bought tools to demonstrate how to use them in my workshops and tutorials, I still find myself going back to comfy handmade tools that I have become accustomed to over the years. They have helped me create some beautiful art and I will not part from what works.

You will be amazed at what you can achieve with the simple items listed below. A seasoned artist reading this may already have discovered most of what is here, but for the beginner, hopefully you will discover a few jewels to get you started on your artful journey. This is not to say that a more experienced artist is exempt from finding something to stir about his or her creative muse.

Places to discover inexpensive items before heading off to the art supply store:

Warning: Don't become a packrat or hoarder.

- 🖼️ Hardware store. This is one of my favorite places.
- 🖼️ Craigslist.org (cheap or even free if you will just pick it up)
- 🖼️ Dollar Tree store (a great place for unique tools and materials. They'll even deliver items on their website to a store nearest you. There are far more items on their website than in the store.)
- 🖼️ Thrift shops and Goodwill stores (I bought box full of over \$1500 of KOH-I-NOOR pens and accessories for \$15. A few hours invested in cleaning and now all looks like new. A great find!)
- 🖼️ Yard sales and flea markets also yield great finds.
- 🖼️ Your home. Don't forget the kitchen, attic, and basement. (I am not a hoarder, so I see it this way; if I haven't used it for years and basically forgot that it even existed, it is most likely fair game for creating art.)

-  Packaging from purchases like tissue wrapping paper, storage materials as corrugated paper from boxes, bubble wrap, mesh or netting, styrofoam container, plastic ware, textured items.
-  Hair dryer: This can be an artist's best friend, especially if you want to work faster by decreasing the drying time. Available at thrift stores for only a few dollars, so who cares if you get paint all over it.
-  Ceramic tile or sheet of thick glass for use as a palette or drying station. Large tiles are available at a hardware store for a few dollars. Two sheets of cheap picture frame glass can be used in place of thick glass. It can be found at a Dollar Tree store. (Just insert a white sheet of printing paper between two thin sheets of stacked picture frame glass, then duct tape along the outer edge. Now that is a nice palette. Cleans easy too. The duct tape is also available at Dollar Tree.)
-  Styrofoam plates and containers used to hold to go foods (They're the perfect material for creating stamps and stencils. They can also be used as disposable palettes. Also available at the Dollar Tree.)
-  Spray Bottles: Large and small with spray and mist setting: Don't throw away that empty cleaner or hair product spray bottle: Thoroughly clean it out before using it for art. Have a few different sizes and nozzle pressures available.
-  Tapes: Masking, duct, and gift wrapping tapes are all available at Dollar Tree.
-  Scissors: Also at the Dollar Tree. They have many sizes and sometimes more than one in a pack.
-  Ruler or measuring tape: Yes, a visit to the Dollar Tree (DT) again. As a matter of fact, you can find most of what's on this list there.
-  Wax paper, plastic wrap, aluminum foil, plastic shopping bags or storage sandwich baggies @ DT
-  Cotton swabs, toothpicks @ DT
-  Eyedropper, cups or jars to hold water and stamp with @ DT
-  Box cutter @ DT (in place of a xacto knife)
-  Stapler @ DT (Use a good quality heavy duty stapler for stretching fabric or canvas available at most hardware stores.)
-  Sand paper of various grit, Rubber bands, binder clips @ DT
-  Sand, small seashell pieces, egg shell, feathers, leaves, tree bark, and other small lightweight natural materials (A free gift from mother nature even though some may be found @ DT.)
- Wire, lightweight found objects such as buttons, pieces of costume jewelry, seed beads, and other small findings.
- Natural sponge
- Synthetic sponges, kitchen scrub sponge, sponge rollers @ DT

-  Small 2 ounce containers with airtight lids: Perfect for storing left over paint recipes and small quantities of other wet art mediums @ DT.
-  Textiles: Ribbon, lace, string, cording, favorite fabric from old clothing, sheets, and cheesecloth. Cheesecloth is much cheaper at a hardware or discount store than in an art supply store. You can find it in the canning section.
-  Simple wooden frames that you no longer want can be used for stretching canvas or fabric over them. Sometimes small wooden frames can be found @ DT.
-  Comb and fork: Use as a combing tool to create texture
-  Netting/mesh and screen
-  Toothbrush (for spatter technique) @ DT
-  Spoon (use the bottom as a burnishing tool)
-  91% Isopropyl alcohol: Is rubbing alcohol. Any percent lower will not work for creating special effects when using acrylic paint. Found at a pharmacy.
-  Kosher or sea salt, table salt, and rock salt
-  All Purpose Lightweight Joint Compound, lightweight spackling, or Elastomeric Smooth (Available at most hardware stores. Can use to replace the more expensive acrylic paste. Elastomeric Custom Patch Smooth is an acrylic base compound. It is usually located in the painting department. This is one of my favorite materials to replace lightweight acrylic paste. Visit the 'TECHNIQUES' page under 'THE LAB' for more about compounds mixed with acrylic mediums.)
-  Transparent plastic sheets: Use flexible yet sturdy material like a plastic pastry sheet or the film cover from a binder or folder. They are great for making reusable stencils that are easily cleaned. Both are available @ DT.
-  Found items with texture or with holes. For example, doilies, a rubber dish mat, and textured papers. Perfect for using as stencils or stamps.
-  Substrates in which art mediums and media can be applied when properly prepped (For example, Cardboard backing from pads of paper, corrugated boxes, and other papers that you could use in a painting. Also consider plywood, masonite, wood board, found cardstock, old sheets and fabric. Keep in mind that papers and materials that are acid free are best as they do not yellow over time.)
-  Handmade paper: It's simple to make your own unique pulp with shredded non glossy paper and water. See video tutorial on the 'TECHNIQUES' page under 'Mold & Deckle' and 'Making Extra Thick Paper'.
-  News paper, magazines, gift wrapping tissue paper
-  Palette knife or small rubber kitchen spatula
-  Various synthetic paintbrushes (from soft to stiff bristles)
-  White craft glue @ DT
-  Small pack of non hardening modeling clay

- Gesso/Acrylic Primer
- Acrylic Paints: When on a limited budget, start with the three primary colors being red, yellow, and blue. Also include black and white. Include gold and silver if you want to include metallic colors in your art. With just these few simple hues you will be able to mix a wide range of colors. Start with student grade heavy body tube paint or even the cheaper 2 ounce bottles of craft paint; especially as a beginner or when experimenting.
- When feasible include some of the following mediums in your art box: Pencil, black felt pen, markers, crayons, charcoal, pastels, inks, and powder pigments.
- Also include a can of spray matte acrylic sealer, and at least one of the following acrylic mediums. For example, include a glazing medium or liquid polymer emulsion, or gloss gel. Acrylic mediums have various abilities and can be mixed together or used individually as glue, as an extender, to produce acrylic skins and glazes, to create unique textures, and even to embed media and fine inclusions. The list goes as far as your imagination takes you.
- You can also include other pigments in your painting other than the typical paint. For example, acrylic medium mixed with powder makeup, stains with wet coffee grinds and teabags, and highly saturated pigments found in plant sources such as berries and beets. Do keep in mind that these types of pigments tend to fade over time, especially when placed in direct sunlight. It is wise to always apply a protective layer of clear acrylic medium to your painting's dry surface to help prevent these pigments from fading.
- There are many art supply manufacturer's that may be more than happy to send you FREE samples when requested. They do however appreciate your honest feedback about your experience and any experimental results. Just email them your request and shipping address. It can't hurt to ask.
- A scanner/copier, printer, camera, and photo imaging software can also be considered art tools. Use them when possible to enhance your art and push your creativity as far as you can imagine. You can copy, layer, alter, manipulate, and preserve your art as images to use in your mixed media paintings. Whenever possible, make a copy or photo you art. You can also copy your art in progress and use it in other works. If you don't own a computer or the hardware listed here then remember that your local library lends its computer, printer, and copier to its members. You will have to pay a tiny fee for prints or copies. Photo editing software comes with Windows installed.
- Wood: Depending on your location; businesses will gladly welcome you to haul away some of their scrapes. An artist friend informed me of a local cabinet shop in my area that gives away wood and masonite scrapes. They were the perfect size for pyrography, paintings, and collage pieces.

- 🖼️ Boxes: Businesses give them away freely. The more you take the more they appreciate it. Paint your storage boxes to show off your unique personality or practice techniques on them. Use different sizes and shapes to store specific art materials and supplies.
- 🖼️ Whenever asked what you desire as a gift, why not ask for a gift certificate to your favorite art and craft store and treat yourself to something special.
- 🖼️ Visit a store's website for its coupon before shopping there. Most major arts and crafts stores have a weekly special, usually up to 40% or 50% off an item. Whenever feasible stock up on discounted and discontinued items that you use most often.

Who doesn't love a useful freebie every once in a while.

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Wishing you a day full of inspiration and creative visions!

C J