

Susie's Watercolor Tips

Painting Hydrangeas in Watercolor

This simple demonstration shows how to paint a group of blooms growing in a round cluster of blossoms such as the mop-head hydrangea. The watercolor technique that will be featured in this tip is using clear water to create back runs or water blooms intentionally!

Let me explain: **Water blooms** (are watermarks also known as back runs, back wash, and water blossoms) are cauliflower looking marks created when extra moisture is dropped into a damp or partially dry area of a painted passage. As the excess water levels out it will "push" the tiny pigments of paint to the outside edge of the watermark. A back run can totally ruin a smooth flat area of a painting, unless you add the excess water intentionally. In this tip I'm going to share a way to take advantage of this "watercolor happening".



Water "blooms" are formed by dropping clear water into the blue painted petal shapes. This creates fuzzy cauliflower shaped watermarks.

When the paper is dry, pencil in the shapes using the "blooms" created by the water drops. Then paint around them with medium to light color and blend off with a damp brush and clear water to soften the edge away from the petal edge. Keep in mind you don't need to paint every petal. The illusion is suggestive.

Some of the four petal shapes should be positive shapes and some should be negative shapes. See more details for this step in the enlarged examples on the right.

List of suggested materials needed:

PAPER: 140# CP Arches Paper

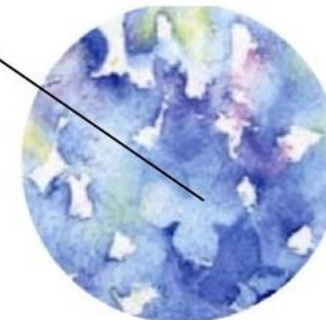
PAINT: Blue Paints
Cobalt Blue
Ultramarine Blue
Cerulean Blue
Green Paints
Sap Green
Deep Sap Green
Prussian Green

Plus Yellow to mix with blues to make greens
Drop in touches of pinks, lavenders and yellows of your choice.

BRUSHES: #8, #10, or #12 round synthetic,
3/4" flat synthetic

1. Starting with wet juicy paint on dry paper I painted the illusion of the cluster by painting the four petals of a flower shape sided by side in a group or cluster. Many of these shapes intermingled and overlap the shape next to it. Vary the blues by alternating the blue colors you pick up in your brush. Using sedimentary pigments in this first step will work well for the technique that follows.

2. While the area is still semi-wet to damp, splatter or spritz or splash clear water into the painted petals. This creates the most wonderful water marks or "blooms" especially if the watercolor was a sedimentary pigment. Don't splatter too much water or the area will get flooded. Now let it dry and let the watercolor "do its thing."





To make a pattern or line drawing to work from, place a piece of tracing paper or transparency film over your photo and trace the simple lines or shapes. You can make the line drawing as detailed as you want. Keeping it simple will give you a looser finished painting.



Placing the tracing over the painting then insert a piece of graphite paper between the tracing paper and the watercolor paper is one way to transfer the flower shapes to your painting. Using this method it is difficult to see the flower shapes.



Placing the tracing under the watercolor paper so the shapes you traced can be transferred to the watercolor paper by lightly drawing them on your painting. They are easy to see using a light box or the light from nature's light box, a window. As you can see the pattern is visible through 140 lb. CP paper.

When painting the sawtooth edged leaf of the hydrangea you can paint the green leaf shape, allow it to dry then add the veins by painting them on directly. In the illustration I've included two additional techniques for you to try. Having a variety of textures help to make the painting more interesting!

The lighter veins shown in the enlargement below are another watermark application. After painting the leaf shape and allowing the paint to settle and start to lose its shine "paint" or "draw" the veins in using clear water and a moist brush. The water moves the pigments and creates a lighter valued watermark for the vein illusion. When the leaf is dry you can sharpen the edge of the vein if desired.

The leaf on the right side of the illustration is scored or scratched to cause a "bruise" for the paint to settle into. This makes a dark mark for a vein. Be careful place it correctly, once the scratch is made it can not be removed. If you look closely you will also see some light lines on the left side of the leaf. These were scratched in after the paint was starting to dry a little and the paint was scraped away from the paper's surface.

Having both light and dark veins on the same leaf helps to create contour and lighting effects.



FINISHING YOUR PAINTING:

Adding definition and details by using both the positive and negative shapes will bring your hydrangea painting to life. This final step in the process is simple but time consuming because you are repeating it over the entire hydrangea bloom. Your painting can be as loose and splashy or as detailed as you want to make it.



The lovely hydrangea painting above was painted by one of my very talented online students. (Deb Leger, Canada)



Happy Painting!

Larger hydrangeas photo references are available to print - FREE to use for personal study.
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