

How to Clean Brushes©

Method 1:

--After removing all excess oil paint from the brush with a rag or paper towel, swish the brush gently in odorless mineral spirits (OMS) to remove additional oil paint. This can be the mineral spirits used during the painting session. Reclaim the mineral spirits using the settling jar system described below. Dispose of OMS soaked rags safely-- place in red flammable materials can if available, allow to air dry outdoors, or get the rags wet and place in separate plastic bag.

--Clean the brush with a mild soap going back and forth in the palm of your hand like you were "painting" your hand. Do not jab the brush into your palm as this breaks the hairs or bristles. It is best not to use detergents, such as Dawn, as they excessively dry out the hairs or bristles. Rinse the brush in tepid water. Repeat until no more pigment is noted coming out of the brush with the soap.

--Re-shape the brush back into its proper shape. If hairs "stick out", a variety of substances can be used to help the hairs stay in place. Vegetable oils, saliva, whole milk, or a small amount of soap can be tried, and are a matter of personal preference.

Method 2:

--This method is better if you want to use the brushes within a day or two and you do not want the brushes to be wet, or if you want to minimize the use of OMS.

--Remove the excess oil paint with a rag or paper towel.

--Instead of OMS, use vegetable oil (I use the cheapest vegetable oil I can find) to clean the brush. Pour a quarter (2 1/2 cm) sized quantity of oil and swish the brush back and forth like you are painting. I do this on plexi-glass or glass for ease of cleaning, but you can also use freezer paper or foam packaging and toss it instead of cleaning it. Wipe the brush with a rag or paper towel and repeat until no more pigment is removed by the oil.

--Re-shape the brush as above.

--If you are not planning to use the brushes for several months, it is best to clean with OMS, as oil will age and get tacky with time. If this does occur, just clean with OMS.

Brush Cleaners

There are several products I use that are useful for oil painters:

--B&J Brush Cleaner and Preserver--this comes in a small circular container and is a gentle soap for cleaning brushes. Although it states that it will clean dry oil paint, I have not found this product useful for that purpose.

--Winsor & Newton Brush Cleaner and Restorer--this product is specially formulated to clean dry acrylic and oil paint out of brushes and is excellent for that purpose. If you forgot to clean your brushes and they become hard and stiff, use this product to restore your brushes to like-new status. Note: Only soak the brush hairs in the solution, as this product will take the varnish and paint right off of wooden handled brushes!

Settling Jar System:

This system requires two glass jars with metal lids. One of the jars is used during the painting session. The other can be a slightly larger jar, but must have a metal lid that has a good seal. The odorless mineral spirits used during the painting session (and/or used to clean brushes), is poured into the settling jar when it becomes too full of pigment, or the painting session is over. The settling jar is kept undisturbed in a cool place, out of the sun, and over time all the pigment in solution settles to the bottom. The clear odorless mineral spirits on the top is then *carefully* poured back into the painting session jar to be "re-used". This can be done over and over. When the settling jar becomes too full of pigment to pour out the clear OMS without disturbing the bottom layer of pigment (usually about 2/3 full), then the jar must be taken to the Brown County Waste Recycling Center on Broadway Ave for proper disposal. (Note: do not put OMS that has been used to clean varnish brushes into the settling jar for re-use. The varnish will add odor containing components and other chemicals to the mixture.)