



Utrecht Art Supplies

Product Profiles: Linseed Oil- Cold Pressed vs. Alkali Refined

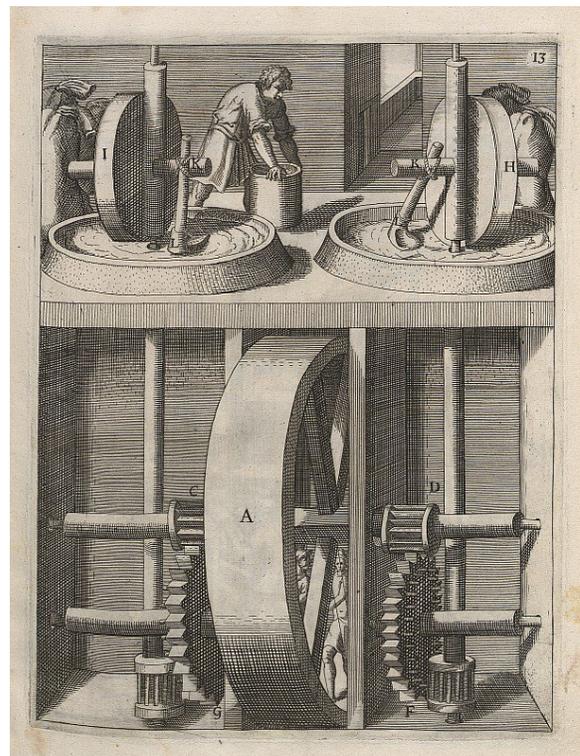
Ask the Expert: " You carry cold-pressed linseed oil in small bottles and refined oil in large bottles for a lot less money. Is there a big difference between the two? Should I be using one over the other?"



A: Both cold-pressed and alkali refined linseed oil are suitable for permanent painting. Both are excellent film formers, and both can be used to make top quality paint. There is a noticeable difference in cost, and while most artists use the more affordable refined oil simply based on price, there are some distinct advantages to each that can be attractive depending on artistic technique and process.

Alkali refined, expeller-pressed linseed oil is broadly regarded as the best choice for manufactured artist's oil colors. Expeller pressing uses steam heat to extract more oil from the linseed pomace compared to cold pressing, making this type of oil more affordable.

This method releases some undesirable impurities along with the oil, however, so alkali refinement (a chemical washing process) is used to remove the gums and free fatty acids that would lead to rancidity and darkening. Alkali refinement yields a highly uniform product with good film forming properties, a controlled drying rate and low degree of yellowing perfect for manufactured oil paints.



Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek

Historical illustration of an oil press

Cold pressing yields less oil than expeller pressing, but this method also releases fewer impurities. Some free fatty acids are still present in CP oil.

Because it can eventually go rancid, cold pressed oil should be used up rather than stored long-term. Some artists who use cold pressed oil "wash" the product with water in the studio, essentially carrying out a crude refinement process on a small scale.,



Flax seeds, the source of linseed oil

Cold pressed oil can wet pigments more quickly than refined oil, so artists making their own oils in-studio may find dispersing pigments by hand easier with this vehicle. It's possible to economize by wetting the pigment initially with CP oil and using alkali refined for the remainder.

Cold pressed oil is not uniform in chemistry from batch to batch, so variations in color and drying rate may be noticeable. Cold pressed oil tends to be darker than the refined variety. The more neutral color of refined oil is particularly desirable for whites and light tints.

At the end of the day, there's not really an overwhelming technical advantage to using one type of oil over the other but the unique properties of each can be advantageous. For some artists, the fact that no chemicals are used in production of cold-pressed oil alone justifies the expense. Others enjoy the traditional appeal of cold-pressed oil, which has such a long history in the craft. For most, however, reliable, affordable alkali-refined linseed oil continues to earn its place as a studio staple for oil painting.

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