



## Utrecht Art Supplies Making Your Brushes Last



**Ask the Expert:** "It seems like I'm always having to buy new brushes, and it's getting expensive. I've heard other painters say they've kept the same brushes for years, but mine seem to start losing their shape after just a couple of uses. What can I do to keep my brushes in better condition?"

**A:** Keeping brushes in new-like condition depends a lot on cleaning and maintenance, but it's also important to use brushes correctly and avoid applications that can wear them out.

### **Cleaning and maintenance:**

Probably the single most important factor in keeping brushes in good shape is prompt, thorough cleaning after use. Oil painting brushes should be rinsed after use and washed with soap specially formulated to remove oil paint and varnish residue. Brushes should be gently lathered, and paint should be squeezed from the ferrule (crimped metal band). Rinse\*, blot dry and groom to proper shape. Dry flat to allow water to drain from the ferrule. (\*Some types of brush soap can be left in as a conditioner and to help shape the tuft.)

### **Select Better Brushes:**

If you start with better brushes, they will likely last longer. Higher quality brushes are constructed to last better than scholastic-grade varieties. Professional-grade artist's brushes are made using top quality, long filaments, often with hand tied tufts, securely double-crimped to the handle with a seamless, corrosion-resistant ferrule. Lower quality brushes have shorter, clipped hairs that are simply glued at the base (that's why they tend to fall out more easily), secured with a single-crimped, seamed ferrule that can become loose.

### **Don't allow brushes to soak:**

Avoid leaving brushes in water or solvents for extended periods. This can bloat filaments, loosen tufts and swell wooden brush handles, causing a loose ferrule.

### **Avoid scrubbing:**

Vigorously rubbing the brush on the canvas surface abrades and breaks filaments and drives paint into the ferrule, where it can cause the tuft to spread out and look like an old broom. If a painting calls for a distressed, scrubbed effect, use old, worn out brushes.

**Load the brush adequately:** A properly loaded brush has enough paint to lubricate the canvas and facilitate smooth movement. An underloaded brush tends to drag and stress bristles. Use enough paint and medium to produce a generous, juicy stroke that can be easily controlled and blended without too much force from the hand.

### **Use the right tool for the task:**

Mixing color with a brush drives paint into the ferrule and distorts filaments. Admittedly, everybody does some light mixing on the palette with brushes, but the primary function of the brush is to transfer paint from the palette to the canvas. Mixing large amounts of color or dispensing paint from a jar should be done with a painting knife. If you really like to both mix and paint with the same instrument, silicone color shapers offer much of the function of a traditional brush while allowing more vigorous use as a mixing tool.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#).

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