



# OILS FOR OIL PAINTING

**In order to avoid problems with oil paint such as wrinkling, cracking and flaking, it is necessary to understand the properties of the oils and mediums you use. Oil paint dries by oxidation (absorption of oxygen from the air) and, deceptively, may be dry on the surface while still wet underneath.**

**Paint is constructed basically of a pigment and a binder or medium, which in oil paint is usually raw linseed oil. The paint may be thinned by means of a diluent or thinner e.g. turpentine, but too much thinner will weaken the binding power of the paint. In simple terms, to ensure that the paint layers dry to a permanent film, the same medium should be used throughout a painting, or fast drying mediums should be followed by slower drying ones in later layers.**

**It is difficult to give exact drying times for oils since they depend on many variables including temperature, humidity, pigment and thickness of layer. For some guidance there is an excellent table in the appendices of "Formulas For Painters" by Robert Massey.**

## **LINSEED OIL ~ Raw, Cold Pressed**

softens brushmarks and increases the drying time of colours when added to paint from a tube. It has a slight yellow colour and dries to an extremely durable film. It turns yellow with time when stored in poor light but returns to normal in good light. It is the best oil in which to grind pigments for making paint, but is not the ideal oil for use as an additional painting medium. When it is used in thick layers it is liable to shrivel.

## **LINSEED OIL ~ Bleached**

has similar properties to raw cold pressed oil but it is paler in colour. This advantage is often temporary as it can revert to a similar colour as it ages.

## **LINSEED OIL ~ Boiled**

is produced by heating raw linseed oil together with driers to make a slightly more viscous oil with a shorter drying time. It is darker in colour than linseed oil and an inferior product to Stand Oil (which has similar properties).

## **LINSEED OIL ~ Sun Thickened**

is a traditional product which uses the action of sun and air to change the qualities of the oil. It is partly oxidised, partly polymerised and bleached by the process giving an oil which is quite pale, slightly more viscous (usually) than stand oil and which has a faster drying time than raw cold pressed linseed oil.

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# OILS FOR OIL PAINTING (continued)

## **STAND OIL**

is in fact another form of linseed oil, refined by heating and partially polymerised to give a much more viscous oil. When used in high proportions as a painting medium, it imparts a high gloss to the paint and an enamel like quality. It is excellent for use in painting mediums and for glazing. It has very good permanence, does not wrinkle and resists yellowing well. In thin coats it dries quite quickly, but in thicker coats has a much more prolonged drying time.

## **POPPY OIL**

is an almost colourless oil often favoured for use with lighter colours, though it will still yellow with age. When used as a painting medium it will soften brushmarks. It makes a softer, less durable film than raw, cold pressed linseed oil but is less likely to shrivel. It is a slow drying oil which is more prone to cracking, particularly when it is used in many successive layers. It is not recommended for glazing.

## **SAFFLOWER OIL**

is an alternative to linseed oil which has only been used in artists oil colours for about 40 years. It is used in the manufacture of modified alkyd resins for painting mediums. So far it has proved comparable to raw linseed oil but it is thought that its resistance to embrittlement is possibly not as good as that of linseed oil. It is also slower drying.

## **WALNUT OIL**

is faster drying than poppy oil and nearly as fast as raw linseed oil. It can be used for grinding pigments but is inferior to linseed oil for this. It is prone to turning rancid and has become more or less obsolete, as it has no particular advantage to recommend it.

## **OTHER OILS (soya, maize, corn, castor, olive, rapeseed, peanut, hazelnut, almond, vegetable, cooking oil etc.)**

Many of these are completely non-drying, others have exceptionally long drying times and form very weak films. They are rarely pale or clear and there is little or no information available regarding their yellowing with age or their purity. Some of these oils may seem appealing because of their very low price in relation to artists painting oils, but they are totally unsuitable for use ~ as are any oils where the ingredients are unspecified.

For further information about the structure and drying of oil paint we recommend reading "The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques" by Ralph Mayer.

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