

Introduction

A sketchbook is an immensely important part of any artists work, it demonstrates the process that the artist uses to create final works, and, gives an insight into their thoughts, development and interests.

Entries can be used as preliminary studies for final drawings or painting but often much of the work may never be used for anything in particular, instead it acts as a personal learning process and the journey towards arriving at a point where finished works can be created. A sketchbook is *not* a collection of contrived final artworks, as is often seen, instead it's your own visual record, notes and research and can be a beautiful piece of work in its own right. Creating your own sketchbook will allow you to explore and develop ideas, if you only ever make a drawing as part of creating a final piece of work, you may be missing out on fully understanding your subject

For a botanical artists sketching in this way is particularly important, especially when working in the field. Sketches are your annotated record or personal library of material which can be referred back to in the studio. It's a great way of learning more about plants too!

What is a sketchbook?

A sketchbook is a type of journal. It's a collection of reference material, rather than finished pieces.

It comprises: written notes both technical and anecdotal, measurements, sketches and colour notes and can also include dried specimens, small study paintings, photographs and reference material. Basically anything that will help you to understand your subject!

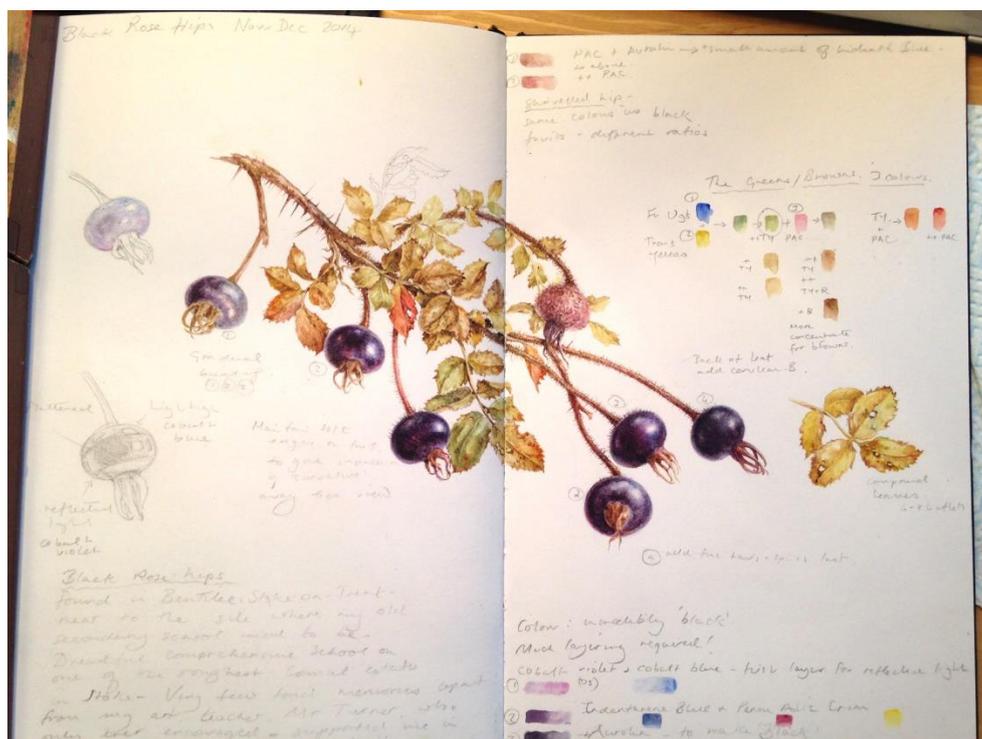
Historically artist sketchbooks have been able to tell us a great deal about the process of the artist than any finished painting can do. Probably most famous are the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci, Van Gogh and Rembrandt. Leonardo was a prolific sketcher, he made thousands of sketchbook entries! It's worth spending some time researching artist sketchbooks and journals to find out more.



A Page from one of Leonardo da Vinci's sketchbooks

What type of Sketchbook?

There are lots of choices available when it comes to sketchbooks. You can buy one or make your own using scraps of watercolour paper, which can be bound together. For practical reasons I tend to use a ready-made book. The book that I recommend is the Stillman & Birn Zeta series, in natural white, smooth surface heavyweight paper (180 lb, 270gsm). A numbers of styles and sizes are available, in both wire bound and hardbound version. The latter is good because it allows you to work across a 2 page spread. The size of book you choose to work in is a personal choice but it's most practical to use a book that's easy to carry around, so the 14.0 x 21.6 cm size is good. This book is available from a number of sellers including Jacksons Art and Dick Blick. If you can't obtain the book, look for similar size and weight books. If you prefer a larger or smaller book or already have a preferred book by all means use that.



Working across a two page spread in a hardbound sketchbook

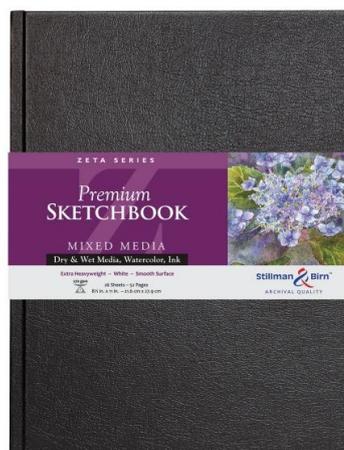
Suppliers include:

[Jacksons Art](#)

[amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

[Dick Blick](#)



What should go into a sketchbook?

Sketchbook work is the very first stage in documenting a subject. It can contain any material you feel is relevant but there are elements that you should always *try* to include.

Your sketchbook may have a particular theme, such as plants from your garden or a specific habitat or a specific subject such as leaves or flowers. Or it can be more generic in content with a variety of material – it's entirely up to you, however it is probably best not to limit yourself too much as this can become restrictive. It's a good opportunity to make studies for planned paintings but also an opportunity to document subjects that you want to capture but don't have time to complete as finished paintings.

Always try to include:

- The name of the subject
- Where it came from, if in the field or from a location of interest
- Sketches of the plant from different aspects if possible
- Descriptions of the plant parts and measurements if appropriate
- Colour notes
- The date you made the entry

Some pages will be more detailed than others, only include what you need, there is no need to duplicate information.



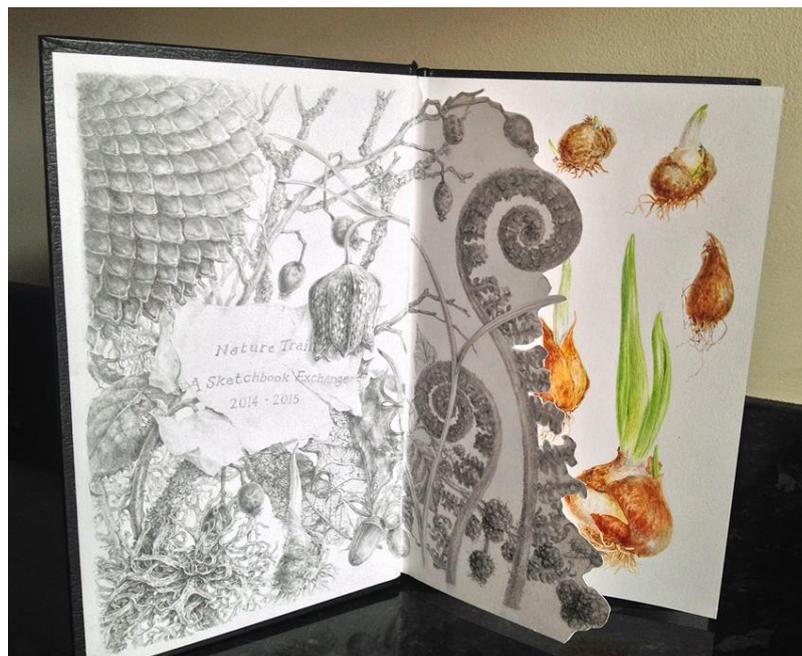
A two page spread of watercolour and pencil sketches of *Fritillaria meleagris* flowers. Colour notes and annotated showing various stages of flower development, different aspects and forms.

Make your Sketchbook Interesting

Your sketchbook should be very personal and reflective of your interests. Why not create an inside introductory page for fun! You can also make a cover to protect it.

In addition to drawings and notes, why not add pressed plants, photographs and magazine cuttings. Perhaps a section on particular colours, such as greens.

Most of all enjoy your sketchbook and don't feel daunted by it.



I decorated the inside of my sketchbook with the subjects I love, as a detailed free hand drawing exercise, which I completed over a period of time. I even cut away sections. There is no limit or rules to what you can do! It's your sketchbook.



A more typical entry, a fairly quick drawing, descriptive notes and colour identification of a Cuckoo Flower

Sketchbook Exercise for the Botanical Illustration Course

- As part of the course you should keep a sketchbook in accordance with the guidelines in the introduction in this document.
- Experiment with both graphite and watercolour.
- Entries can be related to particular exercises within the course but you are encouraged to make with additions of your own choice. You don't, need to spend a long time on the entries!
- Collate as much information on the subject and describe what you see, you don't need to be a botanist to describe a plant and you can always refer to a good guide book of Flora for further information.
- Add to your sketchbook on a regular basis! Don't leave it lying empty and then feel as though you need to catch up but instead use it as a place to practice. For example, you will be asked to make a tonal drawing of a sphere in Part one of the course, so why not make a few tonal drawings and watercolour sketches of some spherical subject matter, such as fruits.
- Or add more line drawings and colour studies of leaves and flowers. This will allow you to experiment and develop work within the course.
- A folder will be made on the Course Facebook Group to upload sketchbook entries.
- And additional discussions and exercises related to the sketchbook will also be posted on the group wall.