Botanical Illustration Course: Suggested Materials List

I provide a list of recommended materials in this document, along with some alternatives, all are materials that I have used personally. I understand that availability of certain brands varies in different countries, but there is always a range of materials that are suitable no matter where you live, so please don't worry if you can't get the exact same materials.

If you already have other suitable art materials, or have favourites that are of sufficient quality, please don't rush out to buy more supplies!

Note that In the first part of the course you only need the Part 1 graphite materials.

Part 1 Graphite Materials

Paper suitable for both Graphite and Watercolour

I recommend good quality, **cotton HP (hot pressed) watercolour paper, weight 140lbs (300 gsm)** such as **Arches Satine,** which is a good all-round paper. Arches paper available in a block is slightly more natural white in colour, there is a bright white version available in imperial sheets, which can be cut to size.

Alternatives:

Canson Moulin de Roy
Saunders Waterford High White
Stonehenge Aqua
Fabriano Artistico

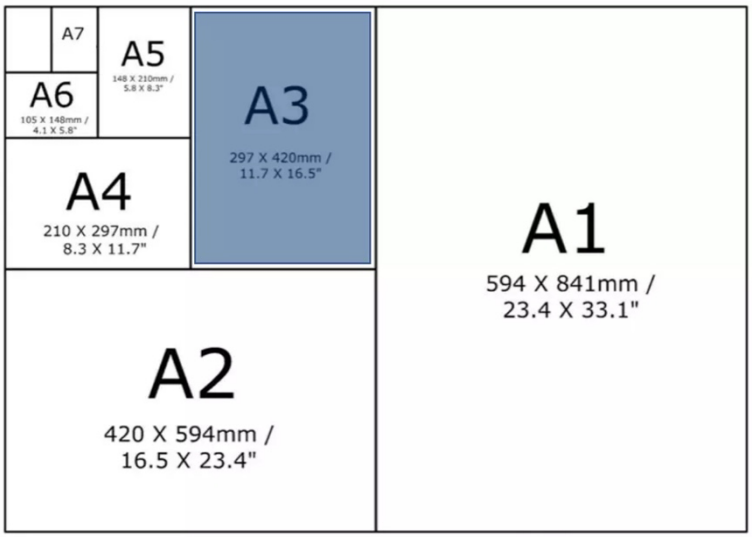
Botanical Ultra Smooth paper, made by St Cuthberts Mill, is not a cotton - but it is good enough budget paper suitable for most graphite work, ink and watercolour.

Paper Weight

140 lb (300gsm) is suitable but heavier weights are available, and this varies between brands, including 200lb (425gsm) and 300lb (640 gsm) in loose sheets.

Paper Size

A3 is usually a sufficiently large enough size but you may work slightly larger or smaller for your final works and study pages. You can also use loose paper, which generally comes in imperial sheets and needs to be cut it to a suitable size, or you can use a block or pad. Note: Never invest in a large quantity of paper until you are certain that you like the paper.

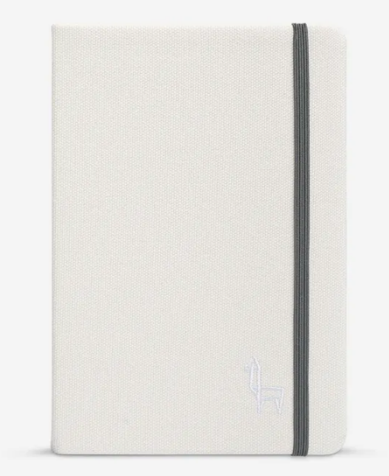


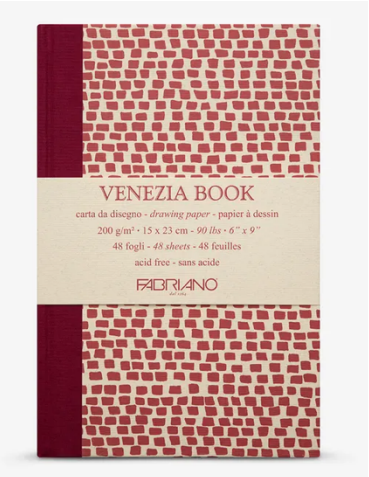
Drawing Paper Alternatively, you may use smooth lower cost alternative, such as Winsor & Newton Heavyweight Drawing paper which 100lbs in weight.

Paper for Ink Some students like a Bristol surface paper, such as Strathmore 500 Bristol plate surface, which is very smooth and ideal for pencil line and ink drawings, however, be aware that Bristol board can be more difficult to build tone on than watercolour papers and it does not take watercolour.

A Sketchbook

A sketchbook- is invaluable and you may carry out the initial drawing exercises in part 1 of the course in such a book.
The Stillman & Birn Zeta series 5.5 x 8.5 inches, 14 x 21.6 cm, 270 gsm is a good choice, (feel free to go slightly larger). Choose the soft cover, because it sits flatter than a hard cover. This paper is very smooth and white, although some students find it a little too slippery a surface for watercolour.
Feel free to use an alternative brand or size if you prefer, alternatives include Etcher smooth (100% cotton) size A5, 220 gsm and Fabriano Venezia: Academia Cartridge, 6 x 9 inch, 15 x 23 cm, 200 gsm both of which are less white than the Stillman & Birn Zeta. You can also make your own book using your favourite paper and I'll post a few links on the website about this.





Note: Paper care is important, keep unused loose paper sealed in a plastic bag, moisture can damage your paper. Only wash brushes in water and water pots should be thoroughly rinsed and allowed to dry naturally. Detergent ruins the paper surface coating (the sizing) this can result in spots and blotches when the paint is applied -nothing can be done to rectify it.

Pencils

Good quality graphite pencils are required, grades between **4H to 4B for most work** although you can extend the range from 6H to 8B,

Faber Castell 9000 series – wooden pencils are most versatile, but you can use clutch pencils as an alternative.

Alternatives:
Staedtler Mars Lumograph range I find they are slightly softer but an excellent quality pencil.
Mitsubishi Hi Uni pencil, they are softer and come in a very wide range of grades from 10H – 10B, you will need to shift the range to 8H, 3B
Avoid using Derwent Pencils as they are too soft and more suited to sketching and create a grainy finish and easily smudge.

A **dark range** of pencils called - **Pitt Graphite Matt** pencils, is available from Faber Castell. These are ideal if you want to go darker without the shine of graphite, which can occur with the softer grades. These matt pencils come in a range, up to 14B, which is very black.

Note: Be aware that there is no standard with pencil grades, and they vary considerable between different manufacturers. It is important to stick to one brand when creating your own tonal strip.

Mechanical Pencils

Although not essential, may also find a mechanical pencil useful for line drawing and fine detail in tonal work too. Faber Castell 0.35 and 0.5 mm leads. The best grades to use are 2H – HB. There are many different brands and models of mechanical pencil, including Pentel Graphgear, Rotring 600, Rotring Tikky and more.

Fine liner Ink Pens (optional)

From June 2026 there is the option to complete some drawing exercises using ink pens, and you may also complete the final drawing assignment in ink rather than tonal graphite. You will need the smaller sizes for most drawing work and pens must have archival waterproof ink

Pen Brands and Sizes
Pigma Micron, sizes 003, 005 and 01
Mitsibishi Uni Pin 003, 005 and 01

Some artists use Rotring Isograph pens, but these pens need to be used on a regular basis and are much more costly, so are not recommended for this course

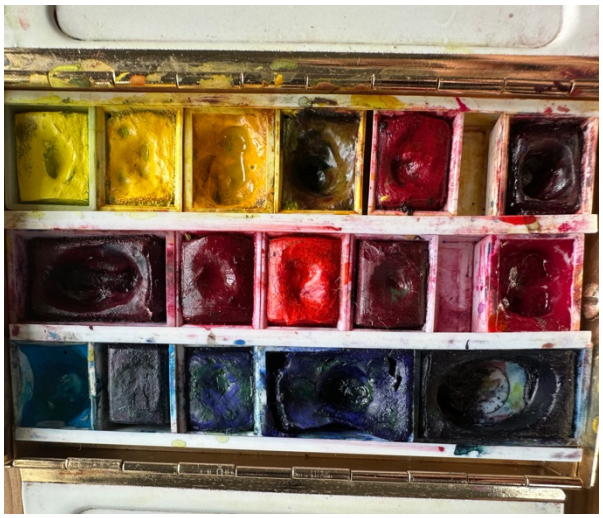
Other Drawing Materials and Equipment

Putty eraser, such as Winsor & Newton, medium kneaded putty rubber.
Tombow retractable eraser is very useful for getting into small spaces.
Faber Castell 'dust free' hard eraser is also good
Pencil sharpener, such as the desktop Mitsubishi KH-20 or to **sharpen by hand, a scalpel and craft knife** and a piece of fine grade sandpaper or sandpaper block for fine tuning the point of the pencil. A KUM Masterpiece sharpener can sharpen long leads.

Tracing paper to transfer preparatory drawings and to protect work in progress, such as Frisk 60gsm weight.
Ruler with mm, preferably a clear plastic ruler
Scalpel and replacement blades for dissections
Dividers - essential for measuring subjects
Hand-held magnifying glass, magnification x 2 –2.5
A hand/field lens x 10 or 15 (not essential)
Masking tape (low tack) Washi tape is ideal
Black ink or watercolour paint (for optional a tonal painting)
Dusting brush or feather to brush away graphite dust

Typical dividers with fine point tips

Part 2 Watercolour Painting



A selection of artist quality watercolour paints is required. I use Winsor & Newton Artist Quality Paints, but please avoid the W & N Cotman paints as the pigments are chalky and generally poorer quality.
A limited palette such as the one shown can mix any colour that you need, even black!

See colour table below (**pigment number in brackets, allows you to match colours with alternative brands**) I find these colours sufficient to mix any colour, including all greens, browns and everything else - I use this palette for all my work.

Reds	Yellow	Blues	Extras
Scarlet Lake (PR188)	Lemon Yellow Nickle titanate (PY 53)	Manganese Blue Hue (PB15) or Cerulean Blue (PB 36)	Add others if you want to
Permanent Carmine (P n/a) or Permanent Alizarin Crimson (PR206) but NOT Alizarin Crimson)	Winsor Lemon (PY175)	Cobalt Blue (PB28)	
Quinacridone Red (PR209)	Winsor Yellow (PY154)	French Ultramarine (PB29)	
Quinacridone Magenta (PV19)	Transparent Yellow (PY150)	Winsor Blue green shade or Phthalo blue (PB15)	
Permanent Rose (PV19)		Indanthrene blue (PB60)	

I use pans because I find them more suited to the dry brush painting as they have less water and binders, however you may use pans or tubes.

Good Quality Brushes,

A huge range of good brushes are available, my personal favourites are miniatures W & N Series 7 Kolinsky Sable Miniatures, size 1, 2 and 4 I find I can paint everything with these three brushes. Also, Raphael 8400 series sables' size 1, 2 and 3 but only buy one or the other of these brands as you don't need both.

A larger wash brush, such as Raphael 8404 or Da Vinci size 5 (or any other good brand)

A filbert brush size 1 is useful – synthetic in any brand, I use KUM or Rosemary and Co. eclipse short filbert

A Synthetic flat, for lifting, moving paint and neatening and for painting colour swatches. Pro Arte, masterstroke flat shader size 0 or Rosemary & Co small eradicator.

Kolinsky sable brushes are worth investing in as they last for years if well looked after. Some of the less expensive ProArte brushes are very good for painting fine detail and lines but they don't last so long. If you wish, you can invest in more brushes as you progress.

Synthetic Alternatives

Winsor and Newton Synthetic Sables, size 00, 0 and 1 (slightly longer haired pointed brushes)

Interlon 1026 size 2/0 for small details

Raphael Imitation Kolinsky 8340 size 1 and 2 and excellent small brush

Escoda Ultimo size 1 also a good detail brush

Any round brush size 4 or 5 such as Da Vinci Colneo, Betty Hayways or KUM memory point

Paint Palettes

As always, a huge range of palettes are available. I find a flat ceramic palette preferable, such as the one at the front centre right of the image below but I also use small round tinting saucers and dishes because of their convenient size. I find ceramic preferable to plastic but if you do use plastic make sure it slightly abraded so that the paint sticks to the surface. Plastic will stain over time so wash after use. Deeper ceramic palettes are useful for larger washes

and glazes but flatter palettes I find do all jobs. A ceramic white plate makes and excellent palette too.

- A cotton or muslin cloth, for drying the brush, never use kitchen towel/paper as the fibres get into your paintbrush and the paper is acidic.

- Optional – Ox gall liquid to help with the flow of the paint

Other Equipment

Here are some suggestions for other equipment that will be useful, but not all is essential.

To light you subject

A desktop lamp with a daylight bulb. I use and low-cost angle poise lamp and add a daylight bulb (rated 5000-5500K) this is used for lighting the subject

To light the drawing board or work area

I use a Native Lighting adjustable arm daylight lamp, a similar model to this is the daylight Company Lumi adjustable task lamp. I also have a slimline Daylight Company lamp, which also has an optional magnifier attachment (additional purchase). Any of these lamps are good for working under and there are many others too.

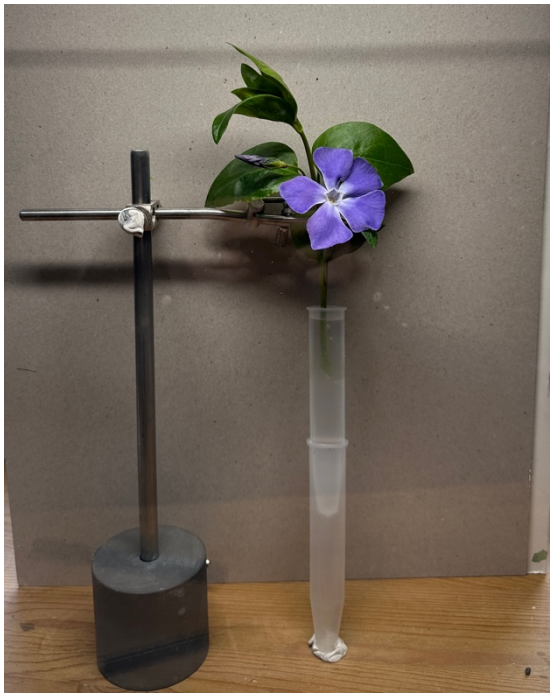
Drawing board

Preferably elevated and A3 or larger. Although a piece of MDF will do the job with a couple of bricks to prop it up!

Wooden adjustable drawing boards are available from most art shops, such as the one shown here. If you want to spend more, a Blundell Harling board is probably the best option. Go for a slightly larger size than you think you need (if you have room).

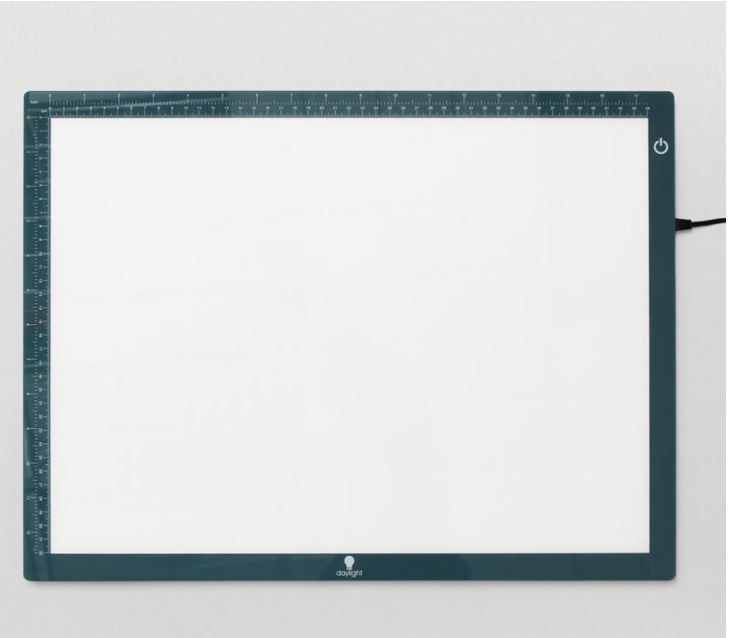
A retort stand

These can be useful for securing a subject into place. Look for second hand ones on Ebay, Such as this one in the image, It shows a flower positioned and supported at eye level for painting and also kept fresh in a florist tube.

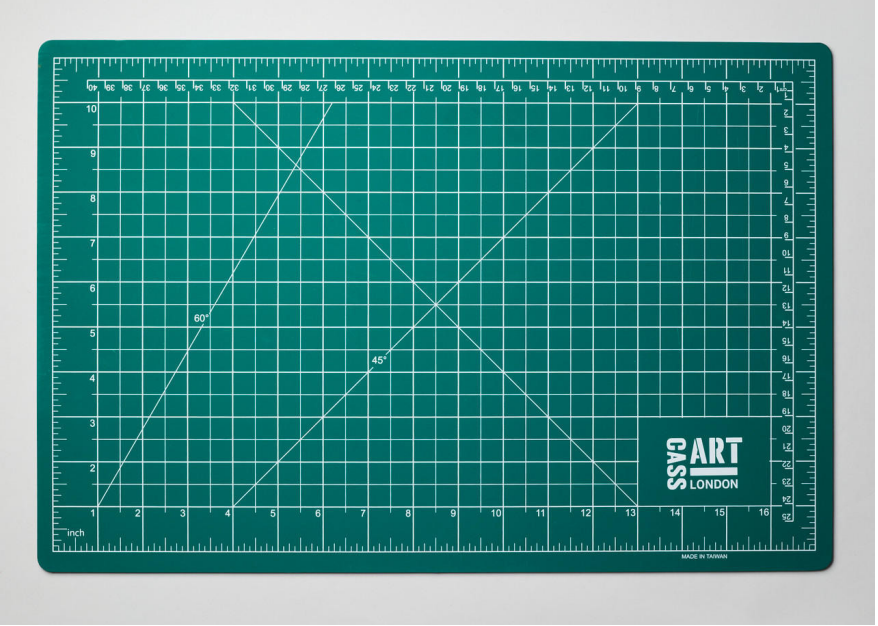


A light pad

A3 size light pad will be most useful for transferring and tracing your outline drawing – it's cleaner than using tracing paper. Many of the latest models are rechargeable too. Brands include Huion and the Daylight Company



A small self- healing cutting mat
A must for making dissections, A4 or smaller is large enough



There are many more items that you could add to this list but becomes costly and unnecessary, and this list is more than enough. I try to buy much of my equipment second hand, which is cost effective and it's good to recycle!

I will add more information on magnifiers, microscopes, proportional dividers etc on the blog for those interested.

Some Online Art Suppliers – there are many more and don't forget the local art shops

UK - ships worldwide
Jacksons Art www.jacksonsart.com
Bromley Art supplies www.artsupplies.co.uk

UK
Cass Art www.cassart.co.uk
Pullingers www.pullingers.com
Great Art www.greatart.co.uk

US
BLICK www.dickblick.com

Amazon – country specific sites