



Brilliant Colors with Egg Tempera Made Easy

by Marjorie Sarnat

A centuries-old painting technique is back, but without all the fuss. You don't need to be a monk to illuminate your artwork with incredible detail and radiant color. Mix it in minutes and paint away!

ABOUT EGG TEMPERA

The egg tempera technique dates back to antiquity. The Ancient Egyptians used it to paint onto stone, and Byzantine artists in Europe used the medium for their illuminated manuscripts. Amazingly, their colors are still vivid today.

ADVANTAGES OF EGG TEMPERA

- Egg tempera produces glowing permanent colors, more vibrant than can be achieved with any other paint or medium.
- Egg tempera has a consistency that allows for incredibly fine detail and delicate line work.
- Egg tempera is opaque and bright, even over dark backgrounds.
- When egg tempera is thinned with water, it becomes translucent. It is not as transparent as watercolor nor is it as opaque as gouache (opaque watercolor.) Layering brushstrokes creates gorgeous rich colors.
- Egg tempera is a permanent medium after it dries. The colors will not fade.

FAST AND EASY

Traditional techniques for painting with egg tempera are way too involved for most artists today, so I devised some fast and easy ways to work

with the medium. All you need is an egg, water, and watercolors. I can't guarantee works will last centuries like those of the great masters, but I, myself have paintings completed more than 30 years ago that are still bright and intact.

Note: Pre-mixed egg tempera paints are available, but in my opinion fresh egg mixtures offer the most vivid color.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

- Egg tempera ingredients — fresh egg, water (distilled preferred), and vinegar (optional) (see “Recipe for Simple Egg Tempera”)
- Cup
- Toothpicks for mixing
- Eyedropper, small palette knife, or small brush not to be used with paint. #2 round is a great size.
- Heavy watercolor or all-media paper, canvas board, or wood panel.
- Tubes of watercolors or gouache paints
- Brushes for watercolor, including a thin liner or small round, a medium size, and others of your preference.
- Non-porous palette. Disposable paper palettes and paper plates work well.
- Plastic squeeze bottle for clean water
- Water container



RECIPE FOR SIMPLE EGG TEMPERA

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 fresh egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon water (distilled water preferred)
- 1 drop vinegar (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

- 1 Separate an egg and remove the skin and solid matter from the yolk.** If you wish, roll the yolk in a paper towel to remove excess egg white. If a little white gets into the mixture it will not affect the performance of the medium.
- 2 Gently grasp the yolk and pierce it with a toothpick,** letting the liquid fall out of the sac and into a cup. Or drop the yolk into a cup and use a toothpick to lift out the solid matter.
- 3 Mix a solution of one egg yolk and 1 teaspoon water together.** Add more water if you find a thinner solution works better for you. Store the solution in the refrigerator.

Optional: Put a drop of vinegar into the solution to keep the egg from going bad. The vinegar will not affect the medium's performance.

ABOUT PAINTING SURFACES

- Use heavy watercolor or all media paper. Wood panels and canvas boards primed with traditional (not acrylic) gesso or egg yolk solution are good options, as well.
- Egg tempera does not adhere to acrylic-painted surfaces and does not always adhere to clay coated surfaces, but Ampersand clay boards do work well.

- Egg tempera will adhere to oil painted surfaces. However, the flexibility of stretched canvas may cause chipping after the paint dries. Small detail areas on an oil painted stretched canvas are usually fine. Also, see section, Egg Tempera With Oil Paints.
- Gicleé prints or inkjet prints on heavy porous paper can be enhanced with egg tempera. Add glazes to heighten color areas and use opaque white to brighten highlights. Add fine details in light or dark colors.
Tip: Experiment first to determine if the results will be successful on your print.
- Watercolor paintings can be enhanced beautifully with egg tempera. Add glazes to heighten color areas or use opaque white to brighten highlights. Add fine details in light or dark colors. A final glaze over the surface will unify the surface gloss.
Tip: Experiment first to determine if the results of using egg tempera will be successful on your painting.

DIRECTIONS FOR PAINTING

PAINTS

Use tubes of watercolor or gouache paints. Acrylics are not recommended for this medium. Squeeze out puddles of paint onto a palette.

EYEDROPPER

To avoid contaminating the solution, use an eyedropper or equivalent to add drops of the egg mixture to your paint. As an option, use a clean paintbrush or palette knife and do not let it touch the paint.

BLEND THE SOLUTION INTO THE PAINT

Blend together half solution and half paint. Add more or less solution, as you prefer. Don't worry about the yolk color affecting your colors; it will become invisible.



BEGIN TO PAINT

Use the solution as you would any painting medium, adding the amount that works for your style, and paint away. Blend the egg mixture into your colors, and paint. Use as much medium as you prefer.

Tip: Paint mixed with egg cannot be stored, so prepare small amounts and mix as you go.

BRUSH CARE

Rinse your brushes with water between colors, and clean them with soap and water when you are done painting.

CLASSIC AND NEW TECHNIQUES

THIN LAYERS

It's best to paint thinly with egg tempera, building up layers slowly. Thick applications may crack. Egg tempera dries almost immediately. Let each layer dry before you layer over it. **TIP:** If you go over wet layers, you can destroy the underlying layers. If this happens, let the area dry thoroughly, then reapply the paint.

OPTICAL COLOR MIXING

Lay small brushstrokes next to each other to create luminous optical mixes of color. Pointillism, impressionism, and other brush techniques for optical color mixing work well with this medium.

BRUSHWORK

Every mark you make with your brush will set immediately, allowing you to cross-hatch as if you were drawing with a pencil. Also try sponging, spattering, scumbling, outlining, dry brushing, fine lining, striating, dotting, lettering, and making small adjacent strokes with this medium.

FINE DETAIL

Use egg tempera for adding detail to a watercolor painting, and for enhancing the intensity of a color. You can create a thin opaque line with this medium, including light lines over dark paint. Egg tempera

is great for adding bright highlights to eyes in a painting, as well.

GOLD LEAF EFFECT

Mix egg tempera medium with metallic leaf powders to create lustrous metallic paint that dries perfectly smooth and evenly. Additional layers heighten the shine. You also can glaze or paint over the metallic layers.

CHARCOAL AND PASTEL POWDERS

Use sandpaper to create powdered pigments from charcoal or pastel sticks. Mix the powder with the egg yolk solution to make egg tempera paints and glazes.

EXPLORE

Try sparkly eye shadow powders, instant tea and coffee powders, interference powders, pearl powders, glitters, and other unusual pigments mixed into egg tempera medium. Invent wonderful effects that are exclusively yours.

WASHES AND GLAZES

Diluted egg tempera can be used in washes and for glazes. Add extra water and bit of liquid watercolor or ink for color. Egg tempera washes make quick drying under paintings for oil paintings. Watercolor, gouache, and ink paintings can be glazed with egg tempera for added color and satin shine. A ratio of 1:2 egg yolk volume to water makes a good glaze. Use more or less water for the glaze as you prefer. You may tint the glaze with liquid watercolor or ink.

VARNISHING OVER EGG TEMPERA

Coat a finished egg tempera painting with acrylic matte or gloss medium thinned with approximately 50% water. This will protect the painting and prevent chipping. Test an area first to make sure the paint won't be disturbed by the varnish.

Tip: Your egg tempera painting needs to be thoroughly dry before it is varnished. After the painting is dry to the touch wait another 24 hours. Then varnish.

Experiment to find your signature technique.



EGG TEMPERA WITH OIL PAINTS

Egg tempera is compatible with an oil painting. The medium offers oil painters a way of making exquisitely fine details on the surface of an oil painting, such as fine hair strands, lettering, and more. Such details are difficult to achieve with traditional oils and oil mediums.

The egg/water solution will work with oil paintings, but here is a solution that results in more flexibility, which is needed for painting onto a stretched canvas. Do not use an acrylic varnish over this egg-oil recipe.

EGG/OIL RECIPE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 part egg yolk (with solids removed)
- 1 part linseed oil
- 1 part water
- 1 part vinegar

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Put a yolk in a cup
- 2 Mix in linseed oil, one drop at a time.
- 3 When thoroughly mixed, add the water and vinegar.
- 4 Use oil paint or gouache paint with this medium.

RESOURCES

To learn more about egg tempera:

“The Luminous Brush” by Altoon Sultan, ©1999, published by Watson-Guption Publications, New York, NY

www.eggtempera.com/

This website of The Society of Tempera Painters offers clear explanations of traditional egg tempera procedures and incredible examples in their artists' gallery. I recommend visiting the websites of Gary Milek, Patricia K. Kelly, Rob Milliken, and Ella Frazer.

www.patricialynchart.co.uk/

Patricia Lynch uses traditional egg tempera in her gorgeous non-traditional expressionist paintings.

www.margarethanscom.com/gallery.htm

Margaret C. Hanscom uses egg tempera to achieve glowing jewel tones and exquisite detail in her botanical subjects, little critters, and more. She applies gold leaf to her paintings, as well.

www.ampersandart.com/tips/eggtemp.html

Ampersand has some instructions for egg tempera not usually seen elsewhere, including an egg-alcohol recipe and a whole egg-oil recipe.

www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Birth-of-Venus.html

The Birth of Venus by Italian Renaissance painter Botticelli is a masterful example of the amazing egg tempera medium.

My book, **“151 Uncommon and Amazing Art Studio Secrets”** is the winner of two publishing awards and is often #1 on the Kindle store under Art > Instruction and Reference > Color.



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What came first, the artist or the egg?

Marjorie Sarnat
ARTIST

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- **Intriguing Visual Illusions** – Keep your audience wondering how they were done
- **The New Mixed Media** – Unusual ways to work with acrylics, metallics, egg tempera, and even kitchen ingredients
- **Art Materials Redefined** – New Ideas for incorporating never-before-tried natural and man-made materials in your artwork
- **Penny Pinching Productivity** – Cost-saving ways to obtain and manage your art tools and materials
- **Compelling Color and Composition** – Understand their power and how to make deliberate choices to harness their emotional appeal

There are over 60 ideas for doing creative artwork with kids, as well. Every "secret" in this book is offered in practical terms with an eye toward boosting your creative output as an artist. This collection will help you create better artwork, apply new and unusual methods and materials, and will ignite your artistic expression.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

It's no secret that author Marjorie Sarnat enjoys being both a commercial and fine artist. Her professional experience includes designing and creating artwork for collectible figurines, home decor, needlecraft kits, children's books, paper dolls, and more. A recent success is her award-winning "Project Runway® Designer Dolls" an open-ended creative craft for kids that she invented, designed, and licensed to a major manufacturer. For the fashion industry, she has worked as a textile artist, and as a painter she has exhibited in art shows and galleries, winning numerous awards for her work. Marjorie lives in Southern California with her designer husband, daughter, and son. You can reach Marjorie and view her artwork by visiting www.sarnatart.com.

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