

Everything You Need to Know About Brushes and How to Care for Them



Knowing what qualities and characteristics to look for in a brush will help in your selection process. Achieving a wonderful finish with your final product is a combination of

the right colours, proper ware and the correct tools. The hair used is a by-product of the food and fur industry, so no animals are raised for the sole purpose of providing hair for brushes.

Natural Hair Brushes

Natural hair brushes tend to be more versatile, longer lasting and generally hold more color than synthetic hair.

Red Sable

Red Sable brushes would be made from the hair of the red sable? What exactly is a red sable? Would you believe it is actually hair from the weasel family? Pure red sable brushes can be quite costly.

Red Sable brushes are available in a variety of grades and are known for their fine point, good spring and the ability to hold large amount of colour. They are ideal for underglazes, glazes and stains and many oil-based colours.

Kolinsky

Kolinsky is the best pure red sable. These brushes are known for superb spring, strength, absorbency and their fine point. Many artists reserve Kolinsky brushes for doing stroke work, but they can also be used with most other finishes. You will likely pay more for a brush of this quality, but you will definitely see a difference.

Ox

Ox hair is actually taken from the inside ears of cattle. This hair lacks the fine tip of red sable, but it is strong and silky. Moderately priced brushes are often made of ox hair.

Sabeline

Sabeline is an imitation sable made from ox hair. The hair is simply bleached and then dyed to resemble red sable.

Hog Bristle

Hog bristle is a stiff, coarse, strong hair taken from hogs. This bristle is commonly found in stiff fan brushes and dry brushes. Brushes made with this kind of hair are ideal for use with acrylic stains, thicker oil-based colours and, in the case of the fan brushes, perfect for crystal glazes. These brushes are not recommended for underglazes and glaze. (with the exception of the fan brush)

Goat

Goat hair is long and wavy with a soft feel. This absorbent hair is fairly inexpensive and is often used in soft glaze brushes.

Squirrel

Squirrel hair is very absorbent and finely pointed but lacks the spring of red sable.

Camel

Once again, you might assume camel-hair brushes are made with hair from a camel. You will not find one single camel hair in one of these brushes. Instead, it is composed of a variety of hairs including ox, goat, squirrel and pony. A common example of a camel-hair brush would be one used for lusters.

Mongoose

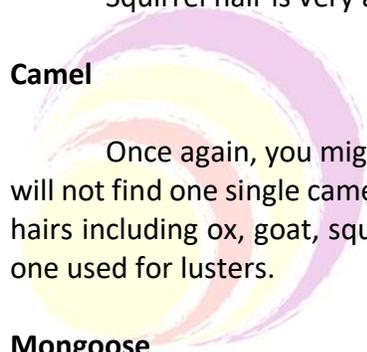
Mongoose hair is very resilient and slightly higher priced. Brushes with this hair are recommended for acrylics and oils.

Synthetic Hair Brushes

You will not find hair from any kind of animal in these brushes. This hair is a manufactured filament that vary in thickness and taper to a very fine point. They are designed to perform like natural sable hair brushes at a much more affordable price.

The performance characteristics of synthetic brushes vary widely, and artists use these versatile brushes to apply a broad range of paint viscosities and types. It is best to check with your brush supplier or manufacturer to see if the synthetic brushes you are choosing are compatible with oil-based colours since some solvents can create havoc with the bristles.

While most water-based products will work well with synthetic bristled brushes, here are a couple of things to keep in mind. If you compare the firmness of many synthetics with similar natural-hair brushes, you may notice quite a difference. Generally, the synthetic will be firmer. If you apply three coats of the same underglaze with each brush you may find the area where the



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natural-hair brushes were used consumes more colour. If the synthetic is firmer, it may spread the colour more thinly. Your end result with a synthetic could be streaky or uneven colour.

This does not mean you should avoid using synthetic brushes for fired finishes. It just means you need to be aware of their characteristics, and that additional coats of colour or heavier coats, may be required to get the designed result.

Manufactured bristles often do not have the holding power of comparable natural hairs. For this reason, they will not retain as much colour and generally will release it much quicker.

You can do a quick test to check for yourself. Completely load a natural and synthetic hair liners of the same size. Draw circles and lines on paper and see which brush can go the longest. You may be surprised how far you can go with a natural-hair brush.

Combining Natural and Synthetic Bristles

Some companies offer brushes made with a combination of natural and synthetic bristles. This can provide the best of both world since the addition of natural bristles with manufactured bristles gives better holding power for colour. You may find these brushes will offer a happy medium for price, performance and quality.

How are the brushes assembled?

Until the 20th century, brushes were entirely made by hand, and even today many brushes are still put together by people instead of machines. Most hand-assembled brushes are of better quality. However, hand assembly can involve human error, so it is possible to have poorly made brushes regardless of how they are put together.

Now you can shop with confidence when you need a specific brush to perform a certain way. Remember, one size does not fit all when it comes to brushes. It may seem overwhelming when you are at your local studio trying to select from the vast assortment, but we hope this information will help make it a little easier.