

Intro

The thistle's spiky shapes and intriguing colors make a spectacular subject in watercolor. We'll paint the intriguing foliage and vibrant bloom with a trio specially selected color. Let's take a look at the watercolors we'll be using.

Manganese Violet is a mid-range purple with remarkable granulation. This deep tone is a rich violet with flecks of darker tones as the pigment granulates into the texture of your paper. Add water for a light, lilac toned wash.

Chromium Green Oxide is a deep, mossy green. This watercolor is opaque and you will notice it's increased density and coverage when applied at full strength. In washes, this rich color has a subtle granulating quality.

Italian Burnt Sienna is a natural pigment roasted to bring out a wonderful reddish brown. This earthtone is brighter than a traditional Burnt Sienna and granulates on the paper, giving a nice texture in washes.

Begin your thistle painting by loading your brush with Manganese Violet watercolor. Prepare the paint by making it a workable consistency by adding water and mixing it into the paint but be sure to keep the color strong. For the tops of the flowers, use small strokes to fill in around the pointed areas that make up the bottom of the thistle. This will make a dark area at the bottom of each bloom, where the purple meets the green portion of the plant.

Once these dark violet areas are painted in, add more water to the mixture to create a lighter shade of purple. This is the fun part of the painting. Starting in the center of the bloom, pull the paint upward with a quick brushstroke to create the spiky petals of the thistle. Make this shape by keeping enough wet paint on your brush to create the full stroke of the petal, and by using a pointed round brush. Use the line drawing to guide the general shape of your brushstrokes, but don't worry if you vary slightly from these lines. The shape of the flowers will look more natural if you allow some of the brushstrokes to be spontaneous.

Be sure to include the lower thistle, and paint around the leaf in your line drawing.

Next we'll make a deep shade to paint the bottom of the thistle leaves. Move some Manganese Violet to an empty well in your palette. Next add some of the Chromium Green Oxide and, finally, add some of the Italian Burnt Sienna watercolor. The resulting shade will be a rich neutral tone, with just a hint of green. You may need to balance the color by adding more violet or green.

Wherever the leaves are folded over, on the places where you see the underside of the leaves, paint in this deep color. Keep the leaves spiky at the ends – everything on the

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thistle should be very pointy. At first, this might look kind of strange because we're just painting in the bottoms of these leaves. This dark green will compliment this brighter green we will add later for the main parts of the plant's foliage. Continue to work your way down the plant, filling in all the areas where the leaves bend and turn.

Next, use a small amount of this same dark neutral to fill in a dark shadow at the base of each thistle blossom. After those shadows are placed, load your brush with Chromium Green Oxide and blend the color onto your paper, all the way to meet the violet portion of the thistle. For now, fill in the outline of you line drawing with color. Later, once these areas are dry, we'll come back in and add the details in this area.

Next use Chromium Green Oxide to paint in areas of the stem and leaves. Get the paint nice and wet by adding water with your brush. Beginning at the top of the stem, work you way down to the bottom. Add more paint to your brush as needed to keep an even shade of green. As you paint in this color you should notice that it is a bit brighter than the green we used earlier on the underside of the leaves.

After you paint the stems, add more water to the Chromium Green Oxide to create an even paler shade of green. Use this light color to paint in the to portions of the leaves, giving contrast to the shadow areas. The point of your brush will help to carry the watercolor pigment into the points of the leaves. As you work your way around the thistle, vary the tone of your paint by adding more water, or working more paint into the mixture. You can also remove some paint that has already been applied to the paper by pulling it away with a clean, damp brush. These minor variations in the strength of you colors will add character to your painting. Some of these leaves are quite large, and you can vary the tones of your paint throughout the entire leaf.

Now that we have added all of the color to the thistle painting, it is time to come back in to add some texture and details. This Italian Burnt Sienna is a wonderful earth tone that can be used to add both details and an interesting color to this painting. Be sure to work plenty of water into the paint to create a flowing consistency in your watercolor. Too much water and the paint will be very runny and difficult to control. Too little water will result in a stiff paint that does not readily flow onto your paper. Once you have a good consistency, use this color on the dry, green areas of the thistle. Add hatch marks and texture to these globe shaped areas of the flower to add all the sharp structures and textures on these flowers.

This color also makes a great addition to the shadow areas of the leaves. Use a light glaze of color over the undersides of the leaves, covering some of the areas we previously painted, to add a mahogany tone to liven up these shadows.

Next, create a mixture of Chromium Green Oxide with Italian Burnt Sienna. The resulting hue will be a natural looking deep green. Use this mixture to add lines and markings to the stem of the thistle, giving the plant some structure and texture. Also use this color to add veins to the leaves, outlining areas through the center of the leaves and radiating outward. Also, darken up any shadow areas that might need another layer of

color. The more you layer the color on the underside of the leaves, the deeper the shadow will become.

Finally, add a little more paint near the base of each flower to create a deeper shadow.

Now our thistle painting is complete with layers of vibrant color and spontaneous brushstrokes for a charming country flower.