

How to stretch watercolour paper

Cut four strips of gummed brown tape, one for each side (edge) of the piece of watercolour paper. Make sure that you cut your tape slightly longer than the sides of your piece of watercolour paper.

Soak your sheet of watercolour paper in cold water for a couple of minutes. This will allow the fibres in the paper to expand.

Carefully lift the sheet of watercolour paper and gently shake off the excess water. Place it on your drawing board. Make sure that your drawing board is lying flat at this point.

Smooth your watercolour paper out with a clean sponge. Remember if the sheet of watercolour paper is not perfectly smooth at this stage, it won't dry smooth. So take your time.

Moisten a strip of gummed tape and stick it down firmly along one side so that one third of the tape width is on the paper and two-thirds on the board. This will stop the watercolour paper pulling off the board when it dries.

Tape down the other sides of the sheet of watercolour paper in the same way. Leave to dry for several hours, away from direct heat. As the water evaporates, the fibers in the paper contract, leaving the sheet of watercolour paper flat.

Keep the board flat while the watercolour paper dries, otherwise the water will drain to one edge and your paper will dry unevenly.

That's it. When you start painting your paper will now stay flat because you won't ever soak the whole piece as much as you did during the stretching process.

Tips:

Don't use hot water to soak your watercolour paper as this could remove the sizing from the paper, and don't soak it for too long for the same reason. Sizing is added to watercolour paper to reduce its absorbency.

Use different colour sponges for smoothing a piece of paper and moistening gummed tape so you never run the risk of getting gum on your sheet of watercolour paper.

If you don't get on with gummed brown tape, an alternative method is to staple the paper onto your drawing board instead.

You may be able to peel off some of the tape, but be careful not to tear the paper. Rather just trim off the edges of the paper or hide them under a mount.

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